

Occasional Memories

Harry Poole

My continuous memories, in the sense of being able to plot the broad course of my life, commence shortly before being aged four. Those memories begin early one morning in the hotel yard at Toodyay with my father taking me to see a horse in the stables. No doubt we had spent the night in the hotel. Later that day, not very much later perhaps, we travelled by buggy from Toodyay to Bolgart, drawn, no doubt, by the horse that I'd seen that morning. On the way it began to rain, not very heavily, I think, and I sheltered under a rug on the floor of the buggy. We lived on camp at Bolgart for the next few months. My father was engineer-in-charge of the railway construction from Bolgart to Piawaning. The date was sometime in the first half of 1916, after the birth of my brother on 11 December 1915 and before my own fourth birthday, which was spent at Bolgart, on 2 June.

From before that I have disjointed memories whose location I can only fix by reference to what I was later told about the history of the family. Much of the year 1915 was spent at Mullewa where my father was engaged on the construction of the Wongan Hills to Mullewa railway, and we occupied a house, not a tented camp as we did in Bolgart the following year.

A couple of isolated memories remain from Mullewa. It was there that, aged three, I fell on an old tin can or billy, cutting my upper lip through, up to the top of the gum. There was no doctor nearer than at Geraldton fifty miles away, but a neighbour, trained as a nurse before she was married, patched the cut up with sticking plaster. By her skill and my good fortune, the wound healed without leaving a harelip or sneer, but only a scar still there. All that is not from a direct memory, but from the memory of what I was told in later childhood. My direct memory of the occasion comprises two snapshots of myself, seen as it were from outside myself. The one is of a very woebegone child making his way into the house after the accident; the other is of myself lying on what I suppose was a table, being treated. The room is dark, lit by what can only be kerosene-lamp light; so I suppose that the accident must have happened at or near dusk.

Another memory, which, if it is indeed a memory, must be from Mullewa, is of myself lifted on to the neck of a kneeling camel. Perhaps a photograph was taken?

I remember the day my brother was born in December 1915, when I was aged three-and-a-half. My mother, with me, was at her sister's, for the day I would think, in [79] Carnarvon Street, Victoria Park, a suburb a few miles from the nursing home she was booked into. We are outside the front gate of the house, and a motor-car has arrived – a taxi I suppose. I was dropped at my paternal grandmother's on the way. That is the complete memory. I did not, of course, know what was happening (though a child of today might well have been told), and I have no memory of being told later that I now had a baby brother. Only in later years did I realize that what caused the memory to remain was the unusual atmosphere – of excitement? urgency? anxiety? – that communicated itself to me, presumably while the taxi was being awaited. Certainly, the sense of an unusual atmosphere is part of the memory.

It seems that when I was told about my brother, I asked what was his name and was told that it was only Poole (at present), so that I began speaking of him as Only. When it was explained to me (but not in these words) that 'only' didn't have a capital letter, it was as 'Poole' that I spoke of him; but I do not have the slightest direct memory of all that.

A cluster of associated memories would date from only a few weeks after my brother's birth. It would be in January, perhaps February, 1916 when my mother with her two children went on holiday to a boarding house at Cottesloe, one with a large garden, on the northern side of a street running down to the sea a couple of hundred yards or so distant. It was kept, I believe, by Mrs Hanrahan (if

that was so, I owe the knowledge to what my mother later told me). But I do remember Harry Hanrahan, a big boy (how big a boy, I do not know, but anyone eight years old would have counted as such – in adult life he became a doctor). My memory is of his walking towards the sea carrying a kylie with which – and I don't guarantee this bit – he intended to kill a cobbler – a poisonous-spined fish, as Western Australians will know. If this last is a genuine memory he was probably not a very big boy by some standards. I also remember seeing a shark being hauled in on a line, beside a Cottesloe jetty.

The boarding house had a gramophone which sang:

I got married to the widow next door;

She'd been married seven times before.

All her eight old men had been called Henry, Hennery the Eighth I am.

I remember my brother Cedric's lying on a table being attended to by, I believe, a doctor. And a memory which all through my childhood persisted in being attached to this place is of my cousin Shirley Langridge, a few months younger than I, coming into the garden crying "Hot Cross Buns!" announcing some genuine, but apparently unseasonably named, buns.

I also remember being in a push-chair going north on what is now Stirling Highway, having just crossed the railway line by a foot-bridge (which, according to the 1992 Perth Street Directory, is still there). I had cut my shin badly and we were on our way to the doctor's. How it happened, I do not know, but the scar is still to be seen. My mother in later years has said that the doctor, before applying iodine, said: "This is going to hurt like billy-o". But my response to the iodine was just "Ffft", with indrawn breath – an early example of the happy physiological reaction that pain-producing stimuli seem to produce in me, lower levels of pain than in most people.

(But at slightly higher levels I am as intolerant of it as anyone. In about 1952, when I was at Bomber Command and living in the mess through the week, I was attacked by toothache due to an abscess on the tooth. The Command Dental Officer said that if I could endure the pain for a day or so he might be able to save the tooth. I remember sitting miserably in an armchair in the anteroom that evening, thinking that if I could be given the choice between abolition from the world of all prospect of a hydrogen bomb and abolition of my toothache, I would choose the latter. In the upshot, the tooth was not saved.)

At Bolgart in 1916 our camp consisted of a pair of tents facing each other, entrance to entrance, the space between roofed over with a tent-fly and walled on one of the remaining two sides by cut bushes, the fourth side of the space open and unwallled. As one stood looking into this between-tents area, the living room tent was on the left, the bedroom tent on the right. Behind one, a little apart from the tents but set symmetrically with respect to them, was a small square free-standing room of corrugated iron which was the kitchen. At the far end of the living-room tent there was a fire-place, how built I do not remember. Indeed almost anything I remember about these earliest days derives from the scenery in some snapshot memory of a moment without prelude or sequel; and if I am myself a significant part of the memory, as I usually am, then I am looking in memory at the scene from outside myself, seeing myself as part of it. It is not that I am reconstructing the scene after the lapse of years: that is how it has been stored in my memory from the beginning. I do not think that I would ever have remembered the kitchen were it not part of a picture of myself standing on the table inside it having ringworm on my chest, or thereabouts, painted. But I am looking at the picture from outside the kitchen and see myself through the open doorway. I know about the fireplace in the living-room because of a picture of myself sitting on the arm of my father's chair to the right of the fireplace while he reads to me from the book of nursery rhymes. (But when the memory is not of an action in which I take part, but is the memory of a feeling, an emotion, as one or two which I later relate, it is a direct memory of the feeling as I then experienced it).

A memory quite certainly associated with a photograph is of myself looking through a theodolite (while standing on a wooden box or the like). My memory, which in this respect I can almost guarantee, is that the place was Bolgart near the camp of Mr and Mrs Hutchinson, a hundred yards or so downhill from our own camp. But I do guarantee the reality of the memory as being direct and not derived later from the photograph; because the memory is of my surprise that the scene I was looking at through the theodolite was upside-down. (Mr Hutchinson was assistant engineer to my father).

It was at Bolgart that we woke one morning to find everything covered in hoar frost. "I thought Jack Frost would come!", I exclaimed. My mother reproved me mildly, because obviously I had not thought so in advance. Nevertheless, I knew that when I had said that, I had genuinely believed that I had thought so in advance. It was an early lesson in the way the mind can play tricks on one.

At Bolgart, I was being washed and soap got into my eyes with the consequent smarting, about which, no doubt with the aim of comforting, my father said: "It will wear off". The core of this memory is of my deep feeling of dismay at the words; because the time-constant which I associated with the verb "to wear" was that of "wear out". No doubt my misapprehension was soon explained to me; at any rate, the sole content of the memory comprises my father's words and my feeling in response.

At Bolgart also, an incident of which I have no direct memory but only the memory of having been told about it in later years. I had come in with a bleeding finger and explained that I had been chopping wood, "and my finger were where the tomahawk went". In those days, "tomahawk" was the natural [thing] to say rather than "hatchet" – probably the same North American influences that say the "creek" rather than "stream".

My parents and the Hutchinsons sometimes played bridge – at our camp, because the Hutchinsons had no children to be minded. It seems that one night I had begged to stay up and watch, and was allowed to do so. My only memory of this, and the only memory that tells me that the Hutchinsons and the Pooles played bridge together, is of the cards laid out on the table – dummy's, I suppose – and myself drooping with sleep and being carried off to bed.

I do not remember that my mother ever played bridge in later years, but I owe to her the knowledge of a part of the history of the game which I have never seen mentioned anywhere else. It appears that originally spades was the lowest of all suits, the value of each trick being such that a small slam was necessary for game in spades. That was rectified by transferring spades from bottom to top as "royal spades", commonly called "royals", thus setting up the system of two major and two minor suits which ever since have been a main feature of the game. I first played bridge during my freshman year at the University in 1929. That was Auction Bridge, though Contract was already on the horizon, and well above it in more advanced circles than ours. Finally, I mention that, as regards the prehistory of bridge, which was whist, I have a book by a W. Pole, F.R.S. on *The Evolution of Whist*. It was published in 1897 just as whist was about to be replaced by bridge, bringing to a halt the evolution of whist.

I have no recollection at all of the following incident except my mother's speaking of it in later years, but I tell it because it says much, in more ways than one, for my parents. Since I could read and since my father was there, it must have happened after I turned four and before I was five-and-a-half. I had seen and read the word HELL scrawled on a wall or the like.

"What's hell, Loo?", I asked my father; but he balked at introducing his four-or-five-year-old son to the concept: "That's your department", he said to my mother.

"Well", she said to me, "Hell is a place where everyone is unhappy, just as heaven is a place where everyone is happy".

Apparently I thought this over for a moment, and then said: "This is heaven, isn't it?"

At the end of 1916 my father enlisted in the army, in the Australian Engineers, and the next month was sent to New South Wales for training. My mother, whose only homes since her marriage five years before had been railway survey and construction camps, went with her two young sons to stay with her parents at 70 First Avenue, Mount Lawley – which was to remain my home until, aged twenty-three, I left for England at the end of 1935. In the late (southern hemisphere) autumn of 1917 my mother, with Cedric and myself, spent some time, which included my fifth birthday, at Wilroy, the farm of her brothers Will and Roy, ten miles south of Mullewa.

At Wilroy in 1917 the uncles Will and Roy were still living in what amounted to a shed a quarter of a mile or so from the later-built house – wood frame, corrugated iron roof – which was there on all our subsequent visits. There did exist, perhaps my brother Cedric still has it, a photograph of Will outside the original shed, taken before he was joined by Roy (I wonder if my father took the photograph when we were living at Mullewa in 1915?). I vaguely remember the shed, still in use for storage, at our earlier stays at Wilroy.

A memory of an immensely long (as it seemed to me) camel train harnessed to a wagon in Mullewa must date from a stay at the Wilroy farm in the winter of 1917 or in the first half of 1921. It is from the latter year that I remember an immensely long donkey or mule team at Mullewa harnessed to a wagon loaded with wool bales which must have been hauled from the Murchison to the rail-head at Mullewa.

It was during the 1917 stay that Uncle Will told me that the kangaroo's tail was essential to its progress and that without its tail it would be helpless. I remember going out armed with a hatchet, my aim being to find a kangaroo and capture it by cutting off its tail. On another occasion I was wandering in the paddock perhaps a couple of hundred yards from the house – it seemed a pretty long way – when I saw a round hole in the ground which I was convinced was a snake's hole. I rushed homewards in panic.

Then, in what must have been early June 1917, we sailed to Sydney to be near my father during his last few months in Australia. Mrs Poole, child, and infant, I was later told the passenger list ran, whence for a time Cedric was known as The Infant.

From that time in and about Sydney. I remember going to church on one occasion with my mother and singing hymns from the hymn-book. I do not remember, but have been told later, that I finished up a good many lines ahead of the rest of the congregation, early evidence of my insensitivity to music. Then, when we were boarding in a private house at Roseville, I also remember my mother and our landlady's complaining about the very slow flow of water from the tap into the wash trough. I pointed out that if you put your finger under the tap (so as partially to close it) the water flowed faster. From the nature of their smiles, I realized that I had made no contribution to the solution of their problem. I do not think that at the time I took the further step, to the realization that rate of flow in feet a second and rate of flow in gallons a minute were two very different concepts, not necessarily correlated (I'd not, of course, be thinking in those words; possibly I did at that time understand my mistake; but probably only thinking over that memory later – how much later I do not know).

In 1995 the East Surrey Family History Society invited members to contribute them on to accounts on *Families at War*. Eight or ten members did write such accounts, which were published by the F.H.S.; my account was the following.

'In early June, 1918, a few days after my sixth birthday, I wandered into the house from playing in the backyard, where I had been the swaggering captain of a heap of sand that was a battleship. From the door of the living room I saw, sitting on the sofa at the far side of the room, my mother sobbing in the arms of my grandmother.

In Great War novels set in Britain, the news of a death in action is always received by telegram; but in Australia, more mercifully perhaps, the news was passed to the family's clergyman or minister of religion, leaving it to him to break it to a wife that she was now a widow. Some ministers, my mother once said in after years, broke down under the continual strain. So it was from a meeting of the Women's Guild that my grandmother was called out to see the minister, to be told that her son-in-law had been killed in action in France. Many years later she described the occasion to me: how she went out of the meeting, feeling a slight importance that the minister wanted to speak to her personally, smiling and nodding to this one and that, some of whom, she said, knew why she was being called.

I remember only two other things about that day: a feeling of guilt (irrational, of course) for my swaggering play on the battleship, and an incident at the evening meal. After attempting to eat, my grandfather pushed his plate away from him; I was instantly suffused with the feeling that he must have been experiencing, and I pushed my plate away from me. Seen from the outside, it would have been the sort of child's copy-cat action that is sometimes irritating to adults, because it seems to be so wholly superficial with no foundation in feeling. But I know that I did feel as my grandfather was feeling and I do not think I was feeling like that until I saw him push away his plate. When I have reflected on that incident it has seemed to me that I was learning an emotion as well as an action.

They kept me home from school for the next few days. I would not have remembered that except for my memory that, back at school, a boy in the next desk leant over and whispered: 'I know why you've been away from school'. I turned away in a sort of sullen rejection. He must have been a school-fellow, then and later, but my only memory of him is of that incident and (an unjust memory, probably) his loutish countenance. I think that I was deeply wounded by the death of my father. I have remembered ever since a dream of the next few days or weeks in which I met him coming up the lawn at the side of the house. Some twenty years ago, reading Marcel Pagnol's *La Gloire de mon Père*, I was reduced to tears by the penultimate chapter, the unexpected effect, I am sure, of his bringing together the death of a parent (his mother) and a death in northern France in the Great War (of his boyhood friend). Some years ago my brother told me that our mother had once said to him that she did not think that the death of my father had much affected me, that in fact I had seemed to be rather proud of it. I think she was wrong in the first part of that opinion; perhaps she was right in the second – there need have been no inconsistency. After all, at that time pride was what society demanded of war widows and orphans. I was an early and eclectic reader and I certainly knew that to be so. Perhaps I fell in with the demand.

My father was an engineer in the Public Works Department of Western Australia. My mother went from her honeymoon to the shifting tented camp of a railway survey of which he was the engineer in charge. The next year she brought me, at the age of a few weeks, to a similar camp in a different part of the State. My first coherent memories begin in a static, but still tented, railway construction camp, of which also my father was the engineer in charge. When my father enlisted, my mother had never had a married home of her own, so that when after training in Australia he sailed by troopship for Europe, she went with her two young sons to live with her parents. We were there when he was killed, and it was there that my brother and I grew up. All that I knew of my father was from what I remembered of him in that last year and a half in Australia, which included my fourth and fifth birthdays, and the occasional, usually incidental, remarks that my mother might from time to time make concerning him.

Some years ago I obtained, from Australian Army archives, photocopies of their records of him, beginning with his enlistment papers of December 1916. There was a surprise in those: both my

brother and I are somewhat below average height, but stocky, so that our chest measurements, for example, are well above average. I had known, from what my mother had said about his height in relation to hers, that he too was rather below average height, and I had supposed that we would have inherited our rather peculiar build from him. But that was not so: his weight and chest measurement recorded at enlistment show that he was slightly built throughout; I had not known even that about my father.

He enlisted 14 Dec. 1916, spent a last Christmas with his family – his wife and children, his mother and brother – and began service on 11 Jan. 1917. Within days he was sent to Roseville, near Sydney in New South Wales for technical training in his corps, the Australian Engineers. Two days after arrival at Roseville he was appointed Acting Corporal, six weeks later, Acting Sergeant – ‘acting’ in each case, because when it would come to his going into the front line, N.C.O.s could only be men who already had war experience. My mother, with my brother and myself, followed him to Sydney. I remember three boarding-houses and I remember a sort of open day at the training school: perhaps it marked the end of the course. We saw the bell tent that my father shared with a number of other men; we saw an immense column of water thrown up from the explosion of a submarine mine in what was one of the upper arms of the drowned valley that constitutes Sydney Harbour (I did not clearly distinguish between what was a ‘submarine mine’ and what was ‘a submarine’); and after dark we saw and heard a mock battle, an affair, as far as I was concerned, of continual flashes and loud noises, through which my eighteen-month-old brother slept soundly in the arms of his mother seated in the stands.

Then on 7 July 1917, the course over, my father was put on ‘Engineer Reinforcements’ awaiting embarkation. That came on 31 October 1917, in His Majesty’s Australian Troopship Euripides. We saw the Euripides for the last time from the lodgings at Coogee of the wife of a fellow Western Australian, whose husband, also in the Australian Engineers, was on the ship with my father. The vessel travelled to Europe by way of the Panama Canal. On Boxing Day 1917 she arrived at Devonport and the Engineers aboard her were posted to the Engineer Depot, Parkhouse, near Shipton Bellinger on Salisbury Plain – I have a picture postcard showing a corner of the village, that my father sent me with a note that he was camped nearby.

On the voyage he had been ‘V.O. (Voyage Only?) Sergeant’ and at Parkhouse he was ‘E.D.P. (Engineering Depot Parkhouse?) Sergeant’. After eight weeks at Parkhouse he was posted to the Australian Engineer Training Depot at Brightlingsea in Essex. There he finally reverted to ‘Sapper’, the Engineers’ equivalent of the private soldier. Presumably the N.C.O.s at Brightlingsea, largely responsible for the training, were men with battle experience.

The great German assaults of March and April 1918 had resulted in heavy allied casualties and my father, after nine or ten weeks at Brightlingsea, was amongst the reinforcements sent to France to make good the losses. On 26 Apr. 1917 [1918] he crossed from Southampton to France. He was at base for nine or ten days and on 6 May 1918, near Hazebrouck in Flanders, finally in the front line, he was taken on the strength of First Field Company, Australian Engineers. Fifteen days after that, nearly a year and a half after his enlistment, he was killed in action.

Later, the wife with whom we had watched the Euripides disappear across the Pacific told my mother (she had the account from her husband, who survived the war) that my father, with some others, had been setting up a barbed wire entanglement in no-man’s-land when a German bombardment started up. They took shelter under some sheets of corrugated iron, but suffered a direct hit from a shell.

My father’s grave is in the British Military Cemetery in the little village of Borre, some two miles east of Hazebrouck. The cemetery lies down a farm road, a couple of hundred yards from the main road through the village. One may believe that war is a very ugly thing in all its aspects, but one cannot deny that these British military cemeteries have great beauty and pathos, not matched by French or German military cemeteries. Those are vast affairs: the burials must have been gathered in from far

around, but the burials in the British cemeteries remain where they were from the beginning. I have never seen a very large British military cemetery in France; some are tiny. In a German military cemetery the crosses are of wood, with names on a sort of Dymo tape fixed on each side of each horizontal arm of the cross, so that one cross does for four graves. A French cemetery will have separate markers on each grave, but cast in cement. For a Christian, a cross is depressed into the casting, a star of David for a Jew, a crescent for a Muslim, no symbol at all for an unbeliever. In the British cemeteries the grave markers are shaped slabs of Portland stone. At the top is carved the emblem of the soldier's regiment or corps; below that, his number, rank, name, unit, and date of death; below that again a cross (or star of David, or crescent carved into the stone), occupying about a third of the height of the stone; and at the foot, ten or a dozen words supplied by the next of kin. On my father's gravestone is carved at the top the rising sun of the A.I.F. The inscription reads:

**19748 SAPPER
L. W. POOLE
AUSTRALIAN ENGINEERS
LOVED HUSBAND OF
CARA W. POOLE
HIS MEMORY IS A JOY FOR EVER**

The stone has a beauty and pathos that are not found in French or German war cemeteries. The Authorities have provided a touching tribute to my father. He didn't contribute much to the war effort – only a fortnight; unless you were to count the year and a half leading up to it, and the probable forty years during which his wife should have had a husband, but had none, and his sons should have had a father, but had none.¹

After my father sailed for Europe, which was on 31 October 1917, we returned to Western Australia, first of all travelling by train from Sydney to Melbourne. Because of different rail gauges in New South Wales and Victoria, that journey entailed a middle-of-the-night change of trains at Albury on the border. I spent some time alone on a seat on the platform in the middle of a scurrying crowd, each member of whom would have been hurrying to get a place in the second train, as my mother was, no doubt, while I waited. Later I was on the floor of the carriage, among a lot of feet.

We spent some time – days or a few weeks – at Eltham outside Melbourne at the small-holding, “St Swithins”, belonging to Uncle Albert and Auntie Beck Toogood, unmarried brother and sister of my maternal grandmother. They had a cow, which I think I remember, and a butter-churn, turned by hand, which I am sure I do. Their piece of land sloped down to a small stream, and their veranda was part enclosed by a creeper whose flowers, in my memory, were swan-shaped and could be floated on water, or perhaps could be tried to be floated on water. Across the road was a cherry orchard from which my mother bought some pounds of cherries, putting them up on the bed where, our mother mistakenly thought, they would be out of Cedric's reach – he was a few weeks short of two years old; but he got at them and ate more than ought to have been good for him.

From Melbourne to Fremantle we travelled by ship, calling in at Adelaide and Albany on the way. From Port Adelaide I remember train-lines on the road. We must have been back in Western Australia for Christmas.

I cannot tie the following observation to any specific year, but I think it must have been made about this time. The scene was the front veranda of my grandmother Poole's house, which was floored with at this time very dusty jarrah planking. Some drops of water had been spilt; because of the dusty surface they did not wet it, but simply rolled over it leaving it unchanged. An insight into (one aspect

¹ Harry's story now returns to his general narrative.

of) the nature of things came to me like a revelation. “Water sticking to things – that’s what wet is”, I realized and enunciated to myself. Till then I had thought of “wet” as a quality, like “blue” or “cold”.

Although at that time the normal age for beginning school was five-and-a-half years, I did so only on or about my sixth birthday, at what was then the Inglewood State School in Second Avenue, Mt Lawley/Inglewood and is now the Mt Lawley Primary School at the same place. The classes were then First and Second Infants, which I believe would normally between them cover the first year of schooling; then First to Sixth Standards, completing primary education. The First Infants were taught in the building of the Church of England, a wooden hall on the south-eastern side of Beaufort Street between First and Second Avenues, about three hundred metres from the main school buildings. Those housed all the other classes.

(When, many years later, a permanent church was built on the large block at the corner of Beaufort Street and First Avenue, which in my day had been occupied by the Hamers’ house, the old church remained a parish hall.)

Because I could read and was acquainted with numbers, I was put into Second Infants. It must have been in the first very few days there that the teacher put on the blackboard a mass of numbers which I understood we were to copy down:

$2 + 3 =$, $4 + 2 =$, $5 + 3 =$, $3 + 4 =$, and so on,

and which I duly did copy down. A boy in the next desk leaned over, pointed to one of the blanks, and whispered “Put 7 there”; but I saw no reason to do so and didn’t. I had not been smart enough to notice that the 7 would be associated with a 3 and a 4, which I knew well enough made 7, and so to tumble to what it was all about. What no-one had explained to me was the meaning of the symbols “+” and “=”, so that “ $3 + 4 = 7$ ” was a way of writing “Three and four make seven”, a fact with which I was perfectly familiar. No doubt it was as a result of this complete failure that I found myself hand in hand with Mr Nicholson the headmaster, a fellow-member of Second Infants at his other hand, on our way to First Infants in the Anglican Church hall. But apparently Mr Nicholson took a wider view than had my class teacher, on what basis I don’t know; and on our way he put several questions to me: “What do 3 and 4 make?”, “What do 2 and 6 make?”, “What do 5 and 3 make?”, and so on, all of which I answered accurately and without hesitation, not, however having any idea of, nor speculating on, the reason for it all. The upshot was that on the return journey Mr Nicholson brought me back with him, and no doubt explained all to my class teacher.

The next year, in which I turned seven, I was in First Standard, and the year after that in Second Standard. In one of those years – in First Standard I think – the classroom was in the main school building; the other year it was a pavilion room, wood-built with sliding canvas shutters, of which there were two or three on the school grounds. I have one classroom memory from each of those two years. In the main building the classroom walls were decorated with stencilled designs (sub-art-nouveau, as I recognized in after years), including passages from Tennyson’s *Morte d’Arthur* – Mr Nicholson’s choice, I am sure. On one occasion Mr Nicholson came into the classroom and, for what reason I never knew, declaimed a passage from *Morte d’Arthur*, it might have been “And all day long the noise of battle rolled”. I was enthralled. In the classroom memory from the pavilion room, we had had a history lesson on the Danish incursions into England, and had had to write an account in our own words. My account began: “The Danes were a piratical people”. The teacher asked where I had got the word “piratical”. I didn’t know. “Isn’t it a real word?”, I asked somewhat anxiously. “Oh, yes. It’s a real word”; and that was that.

Somewhere about this time we had to write on the origins of the Great War, so recently ended. We must have had a lesson on the subject – or else the question would never have been put – but evidently I had absorbed nothing from the lesson. I knew that George V and the Kaiser were first cousins and the best I could do was to write that the King had quarrelled with his cousin. I knew as I

wrote that it was a quite inadequate explanation; justly, I got no credit for it. (Perhaps it was not very much more inadequate than what our lesson would have said about it).

It was about this time, when I would have been eight years old, that my mother explained to me that a hundred years, though a long time, was not an inconceivably long time. For example, she said, when she was a girl she had known her grandfather, he had lived with the family; and by now it was more than a hundred years since her grandfather was born: so here was a link between myself and someone who had been living a hundred years before then.

But it was a year or two before that that the influenza pandemic of 1918–1919 struck. No-one in our household was directly affected, but the Langridge household was; for some time my mother was away nursing them. At school we all brought mugs or cups – mine was a telescopically collapsing beaker – and with the whole school lined up in the playground, a few older boys went round with pails of Candy’s fluid (a solution of potassium permanganate), dishing it out into our beakers, from which we gargled it in company.

In the first year or two at school we were introduced to singing lessons. For those we went to the Church of England hall where the First Infants were taught and where their teacher, Miss Drummond, whom I remember as a busty blonde, taught singing also. At the first lesson she made some sort of classification of her future pupils. For child by child, she struck a note on the piano and said “Sing that”. When it came to my turn I made some sort of a noise. “You grunt like a pig”, she said, “Stand over there”; and I joined a small group which would need special attention, or, more likely, would not be worth bothering about.

I have already mentioned my low level of appreciation of music. There was a time (it must have been when I was five or six) when I supposed that the words of a song would determine its tune. But I am not quite unresponsive to music. It was during these years when I was seven or eight, that I remarked to my mother: “We had a new hymn at Sunday School today that I liked very much”. I knew that it was the tune that I had liked, not the words; I was already sensitive enough to words to know that those were beneath contempt by any literary standard. They went something like:

Afar on the desolate billow the sailor sails the sea,
Alone with the storm and the tempest, yet never alone is he,
Never alone is the Christian who lives by faith and by prayer,
For God is a friend unfailing and God is everywhere.

Long years afterwards (the years between age eight and age sixteen are long ones) I discovered that the tune that I had so much liked was the German folk-tune to which Heine’s *Die Lorelei* is usually sung. I can appreciate tunes and to some extent distinguish between the good and the not so good, but appreciation of any more complex musical structure seems beyond me.

For the Christmas holidays at the end of my year in Second Standard, 1920, we went up to the farm at Wilroy, our mother, Cedric, and myself, with two or three cousins. Jim Duncan and Hilda Langridge, I think. Every holiday that we spent at the farm my mother took two or three cousins; I find it difficult to remember which cousins came with us on any specific year. The railway siding by Wilroy farm was originally named Kockatea (pronounced Cock-a-tear) from Kockatea sheep station a few miles to the west. But there was no road from the siding to the sheep station, which used Mullewa as its rail base. When, as could happen, freight addressed to “Kockatea Station, Mullewa” was dropped off at Kockatea siding ten miles south of Mullewa, it was a considerable inconvenience to the station manager; and by 1920 the siding was renamed Wilroy from Will and Roy’s farm, which was the nearest place to the siding – the distance to the entrance gate was half a mile, to the homestead a mile.

There were two passenger trains a week to Mullewa (and on to Meekatharra). They left Perth towards eight in the evening and, if on time, reached Wilroy after 320 miles run at 2 p.m. next day. On a later journey to Wilroy, the first watch I ever owned was in my top pocket. While I was leaning too far out of the carriage window, it dropped out of the pocket to the ground below. I had the sense to note that the next milepost showed 181 (miles from Perth). Arrived at Wilroy, we told Uncle Will about the loss; a day or two later he told the length-runner about the watch dropped on the west side of the line between the 180 and the 181 mileposts. The length-runner passed the message to his fellow on the next run to the south, who perhaps passed it southwards again. At any rate within not many days the watch was again in my possession.

The twice-weekly trains from Perth carried mail and newspapers. Mail for Wilroy went to the Mullewa post office whence it was collected by the Mullewa baker, who also acquired on behalf of Will and Roy copies of *The West Australian*, the Perth daily newspaper. So, each twice-weekly train travelling south from Mullewa towards Perth carried a flour-sack filled with loaves of bread topped by three *West Australians* and half a week's worth of mail for the farm.

At the end of those 1920–21 Christmas holidays my mother felt that her brothers were especially in need of her attention and we did not return to Perth for the beginning of the school year as we normally did, but stayed on, in fact until early June. It was a glorious time for us children. When school opened my mother got from the school teacher at Mullewa details of the syllabus, appropriate to the age of each of the children for whom she was responsible, and gave us our lessons first thing in the morning. Our schoolwork was over each day by 8 a.m.

In one incident which I can fix as occurring during those months I was astride a horse going fast along a track with a closed gate ahead which I had seen but the horse apparently hadn't, and was resisting my attempts to slow him up. Only at the last moment did he realize what was in front of him and stopped abruptly, while I continued on over his head and on to the ground at the other side of the gate. There is still, seventy-five years later, a small flap of flesh on the inside of my lower lip, bitten into as I landed. It was probably during some later holidays at Wilroy that a somewhat similar thing happened to Jim Duncan. We were cantering across land that had been cleared but on which suckers had grown up. Across our path there was a row of fence-posts between which the wires never had been strung. Just as he came up to the row of posts Jim's horse apparently noticed them among the suckers for the first time, misinterpreted them as presenting a real barrier, and stopped abruptly, precipitating Jim over the imaginary fence.

As I have said, after the near-six-month stay at the farm in 1921 we returned to Perth in early June. The south-going train left Wilroy in mid-afternoon and arrived in Perth early next morning. It was already winter, there was no heating in the carriage, no sleeping berths with bedding, and towards dawn the chill was bitter. All we children, myself the oldest at just turned nine, were crying with the cold, but there was nothing our mother could do about it. At Northam or thereabouts there would be in those days boys on the platform selling, at a shilling apiece, beer-bottles filled with hot milked and sugared tea. When cycling in the heat of Ceylon during the war I have drunk at roadside boutiques tea made by percolating hot water through tea dust from tea-drying floors. Its deliciousness equalled but did not exceed that of that beer-bottled tea. No other tea has ever come near either.

Back at Inglewood school after having missed half a year's formal schooling, substituted for by the lessons before eight in the morning that my mother had given us, the question must have arisen as to what Standard I should be put in; had I been at school from the beginning of the year, I should have been in Third Standard. I was questioned by what must have been the First Assistant. I suppose she must have asked other questions, but some on weights and measures are all I remember of the interview.

“How many ounces in a pound?”, “How many pounds in a stone?”. I knew the answers to those from household usage. “How many stones in a quarter?”. I didn’t know. “How many quarters in a hundredweight?”. I felt that four couldn’t possibly be wrong for that, and gave “Four” as the answer.

The upshot was that I was assigned to Fourth Standard, my mother’s half year’s tuition thus replacing a year and a half of school. In her account of a London childhood of the 1870s, Molly Hughes remarks that she has “come to think that the main value of school life is to prevent one’s getting on too fast in the natural surroundings of home”.

To continue with memories of the farm, some general, some specific but not necessarily associated with those months in the first half of 1921: Soon after we would arrive a week or so before Christmas, harvesting would begin. The machine used was what we knew as a “harvester” but in Britain would be called a “combine harvester” or simply a “combine” – so-called because combining the actions of reaping and threshing. Lying naked in the hopper of a harvester while the grains of wheat paper down on one is a delicious sensation.

(The use of “combines” in Australia much predated their use in Britain. Henry Hague, a former resident of Les Canebieres, who before he retired had spent a good many years selling French farm machinery in the States, all but told me I was mistaken when I spoke to him of their being used in Western Australia in the early 1920s.)

At regular intervals, when the hopper was full, the wheat it contained would be drained into bags which would be dumped to ensure proper packing and sewn closed – using twine and, appropriately enough, a bag needle. Wheat bags were nominally three bushels or conventionally 180 pounds in weight. A wagon load of bags having accumulated, they were carted to the railway siding – which would have been called a “halt” in England. For no particular reason, I remember lying in the sun on the top of a wagon-load of bags of wheat while the horses drawing the wagon slowly plodded the several miles between an outlying paddock and the siding. In spite of the fact that ever since the land had been cleared its role had been to grow wheat, it was a “paddock”. “Field”, as any rate in those days, was no more than a literary word; just as was “forest” rather than “timber”.

At the railway siding there would be a lumper to receive the wheat. He was the agent of the firm to which the farmer was selling it, and during the harvest camped at the siding in a tent which might be made of old sacking. He was provided with a weighing machine on which each bag was weighed, its weight in pounds being marked in black on the bag itself and entered into an appropriate form – no doubt in duplicate, one copy for the purchasing company, one for the farmer. A very occasional bag would turn out to weigh more than 200 pounds; such a one called for special treatment, because wheat lumpers at the docks would refuse to handle more than 200 pounds at a time. Some farmers would bleed the bag down to an acceptable weight, introducing the excess wheat into a lighter bag; but Uncle Will took the cavalier course of having the bag marked “200”, sacrificing the payment he would otherwise have received for the extra pounds.

The bag of wheat having been satisfactorily processed, it was lumped on to one of the railway trucks which had been shunted on to the siding for the purpose and which, when loaded, would be picked up by some passing goods train. There existed charts – I forget where, perhaps on the wall of the siding shed – showing, for each type of truck the proper way to dispose the load of bags (and each railway truck, whether open, such as those into which the bags of wheat were loaded, or roofed over, were marked MIL.CAP.10 M. or the like – only the figure varied from one type of truck to another; that stood for “Military Capacity: ten men”).

When I revisited the area in 1966 in company with my cousin Jim Duncan bulk handling of wheat had become universal. Although it was outside harvest time, I saw that every siding was equipped

with bins – great sheds, really – for storing wheat in bulk between its being delivered there by the farmers and its being picked up by a goods train.

From over the years three lumpers² at Wilroy siding remain in my memory. One was not the lumper himself but a boy who, unusually, was employed by him. The boy was around my own age, fifteen or sixteen, I suppose. He earned a pound or more a day, so that, as he said to me, “you don’t mind spending a pound or two at Mullewa during the week-end”. That was a concept immeasurably beyond my range, and one for which, somewhat priggishly, I felt a slight contempt. The fact that the boy earned so much argues that the lumper himself must have had very well-paid work while it lasted.

Nogal was a lumper who during one harvest was at Wilroy siding, camping with his wife in a tent certainly made of old sacking. He was a Pole left over, as it were, from the Great War; his wife was a little cockney sparrow of a woman, from Poplar with its 60,000 people to the square mile, but now with her nearest neighbours, my uncles, a mile away, the next nearest four miles away. It is she I really remember, especially her laughing glee when a bottle of her home-brewed beer that she was opening sprayed itself all over Uncle Will.

My third lumper was a Scandinavian, with no very great command of English. By now I must have been nineteen or twenty and the Depression had set in.

“You got a job down in Pert’?” he asked.

“I’m a student at the University”.

He nodded slowly three or four times, his eyes on my face, but he obviously hadn’t understood what I was saying, and a few sentences later he returned to the subject.

“You got a job down in Pert’?”

“I’m a student there; I go to the University”.

Again a slow nod and a look of incomprehension. But evidently I was doing something down in Perth and he produced the response which in those days couldn’t fail to meet the case.

“Better dan not’ing”.

After the harvest was in and carted, came the job of bringing in the hay. In those dry and grassless parts, haymaking was very different from haymaking in Britain. It began by planting wheat-seed to provide the substitute for the hay grasses of a more temperate region. I think this planting must have been distinctly earlier than the planting for the grain crop, because by September the wheat was formed in the ear, the plant still green, but on the point of turning colour. At this stage it was cut with a reaper-and-binder and the sheaves stacked into stooks in the paddock and left for the next three months or so. I saw, and took a small part in, this operation when I was staying at the farm during a September University vacation.

In January, after the wheat harvest was completed, the hay sheaves were brought in to be cut into chaff. Stock by stock, they were pitchforked on to the wagon, drawn by two horses. Under many, I think most, of the stooks there would be a nest of mice, scattering as their shelter disappeared; under an occasional stook there would be a snake, perhaps a predator on the mice. Always, I think I can say, the snake, certainly venomous, was despatched by pitchfork. There was one occasion when a mouse was the cause of one of the most violently chaotic scenes in my experience. One of the two horses drawing the wagon, waiting quietly with his fellow while a last stock of sheaves was being loaded, was Long White, easily the most neurotic of all the horses on the farm. Fleeing from its disintegrating home, this mouse thought to find refuge by running up Long White’s leg. Long White went mad, and for a few moments, which in the experiencing lasted a long time, the only reality

² I have a feeling that he was NOT called a lumper; but, if that is so, I cannot at present remember what he was in fact called.

seemed to be a tangle of trace chains and panicking horses. I saw Cedric, high up on the top of the wagon-load of sheaves, slide down the rear of the pile in a way which I am sure he would not have reckoned feasible if he'd had time to think about it.

Each wagon-load of sheaves was unloaded by the chaff-house, not far from the homestead; and hay-carting completed, chaff-cutting began. The chaff-house had been a dwelling on a neighbouring farm, bought by the uncles at a sale and re-erected for its new role. As such it consisted of one large room which at the end of chaff-cutting was filled to where the ceiling would have been had there been a ceiling below the pitched roof, and one much smaller room which provided the only access from outside and in turn gave access to the store of chaff. Outside the chaff-house, against one of the long walls, was the chaff-cutter, powered by an oil engine. With the oil-engine going, sheaf by sheaf the sheaves were fed into the chaff-cutter, the twine binding each being cut and discarded as it was presented to the machine, which drew it in cutting it into chaff as it did so, allowing the chaff to fall on to a continuously running endless elevator which carried it up through an opening in the wall of the chaff-house, and dropped it in.

We children were required to do very little work on the farm and any that was required of us we enjoyed – except chaff-cutting. It was done in the heat of summer, in an atmosphere thick with chaff-dust, and with the chaff-cutter ceaselessly demanding fresh sheaves at a rate that always seemed at the limit of our ability to achieve. The sound of the oil-engine stuttering on the point of temporarily stopping work was the pleasantest thing I remember about chaff-cutting. My mother tended to feel that our attitude towards the job was exaggerated and ungrateful, until one day she herself put in a spell on the job and concluded that our view was at least not very exaggerated.

Behind the chaff-house were the horse-stalls, unroofed, unwalled, just a framework made from rough-trimmed logs. Each horse had his own stall which he occupied each night. Each feed was a pailful of chaff – the pail converted from a used kerosene tin – mixed in with a couple of handfuls of oats (I do not guarantee my memory of these quantities). The stalls were occupied only during working periods, harvesting, ploughing and so on. Otherwise the horses were turned out to the freedom of the paddocks and the stalls were empty.

There were always horses available for us children to ride, with a saddle for each, and the spring cart was driven to the siding at least twice a week to meet the train for mail, bread, and newspapers. I do not remember what arrangements were made for all that. One day when the stalls should have been empty I happened to visit them and there standing patiently in his usual stall was Nugget. Projecting from his rump was the end of a wooden stake which proved to be fourteen inches long, pointed at the far end, but about an inch and a half in diameter where it emerged. It must have been an erect tree stump, on to which he had rolled. The uncles pulled it out and treated the wound.

Ploughing was as different from ploughing in Britain as haymaking was from haymaking in Britain. For those light soils the implement called a plough would in Britain have been called, I think, a disc harrow. It was very wide, drawn by a team of horses in line abreast, comprising perhaps a dozen discs, cutting a dozen furrows at once.

The reliance on horses alone for draught power, which I have so far implied, lasted until about the mid-twenties. The first tractor was a tank-tracked Caterpillar, the first car a Model T Ford, succeeded by a small Chevrolet truck. During the last time I stayed at the farm, in the earlier nineteen-thirties, the last of the horses died.

All the rope on the farm was made on the place from binder twine, using a hand-turned machine with a number of rotating heads, the whole itself rotating. I have never comprehended the physics behind the stability of an ordinary twisted rope.

All blacksmithing to be done was done by the uncles. They had a forge, not really very unlike a barbecue. What would normally be bellows was provided by a hand-operated fan. The fuel was coal. The coal was provided by the West Australian Government Railways. We children used to take the spring cart alongside the railway for a mile or so and back again, picking up every lump of coal that had fallen off passing engine-tenders since the last coal-gleaning.

I say we “used to”; I certainly remember doing it once. For children, a thing done once, with no characteristic branding it as a unique happening, can easily acquire the status of something that used to be done. I first realized the truth of that over forty years ago when my daughter Mary said: “When we were little, Daddy used to take us” and I knew that when they had been little Daddy had once done so. Simultaneously I recognized that some of the things that I “used to” do as a child had probably or certainly been done only once.

Blacksmithing did not include horseshoeing. At the farm horses went as unshod as did we children.

The land at the farm was to a small extent under timber, typically York Gum or other eucalypts. Those were the best patches; when any was cleared it was done by ring-barking the trees and leaving them to die, then, probably the next year, coming back and clearing them off by burning. Often, especially in later years, the clearing of timber was undertaken by contractors, such as Matt O’Pack, an immigrant from Yugoslavia, and his partner. His original name was something like Opacak, but he or others had Australianised it somewhat. I remember his having a Serbo-Croat calendar or the like from which it was determined that Uncle Will’s patron(ess) was Widow Bridget. The name Bridget was fairly easily determinable from its Serbo-Croat equivalent, but the translation “Widow” called for a bit of explanation, which, after a bit of difficulty, came out as “her man is dead”. Acting on a hint from the agricultural pages of *The Leader* (a weekly to which my grandparents subscribed and which, after being read by us in Mount Lawley, was posted to the farm), when ring-barking Will used a solution of arsenic which shortened the delay between ring-barking and land-clearing. On employing Matt O’Pack, Will tried to explain to him the process, but, Will reported, Matt preferred methods familiar to him.

“You want land for the plough. I give you land for the plough. Good for you. Good for me.”

Another pair of clearers employed by the uncles were Curly and his partner, whom I never met. Curly seems to have been the dominant one of the pair, giving rise to his partner’s rather plaintive comment to Will concerning the tucker they had on camp: “Ah lahke rahce, but Curly, he lahkes meat.”

However, most of the land was under scrub, which could be dense six-foot-high tamar scrub. For this a scrub-roller was used, followed by burning off the flattened scrub. The scrub-roller was made on the farm, starting with an old boiler, typically a steel cylinder a yard or so in diameter and perhaps ten feet long. One such was delivered at the siding for the uncles during one of our stays at the farm. Its conversion to a scrub-roller called for blacksmithing and the provision of a framework of roughly trimmed logs by which to transmit the draught of the horse team, or later the tractor, to the rolling boiler. The log constituting the forward-pointing drawbar was somewhat offset from one end of the boiler, so that the draught team would be tracking on the already rolled-down scrub of their previous circuit. I believe that I am right in saying that in the denser scrub the track for the first circuit had to be hand-cut. But although much land was cleared, much more was still uncleared.

Will was not a man ever to be satisfied with moderate achievement. The standard farm in those parts, let on some sort of agricultural lease, was 2500 acres – about 1000 hectares to those not understanding acres. Will and Roy had adjacent blocks so that Wilroy started off as 5000 acres; but Will was not satisfied with what he saw as such small affairs. He added blocks taken up in the name

of relations. There was “Poole’s”, nominally in the name of my mother; “Langridges” in the name of their sister Effie; “A. J. Duncan”, their brother Alex; and I believe one also in the name of their father William Duncan. That would amount to 15,000 acres, far in excess of the two thousand five hundred farmed by others, or five thousand by a couple of partners.

So, as Will saw it, by clearing the better land for farming he would have, from the 6000 hectares or so, a farm effectively of the size of his neighbours’ 1000 or 2000 hectares, but of much richer potential than theirs.

That low man goes on adding one to one,
His hundred’s soon hit:
This high man, aiming at a million,
Misses an unit.

Will always aimed at the million, but whether in farming or prospecting for gold he missed the unit. His tragedy was that living and aiming as he did, he was not able, or must have felt that he was not able, to marry young. He was splendid with children, whether very young or older ones, and he should have had children of his own. To me, he gave without knowing it, much of what a father would have given had I had one beyond my sixth year.

A greater tragedy was that he drew Roy, who was of a completely different temperament, into the same life. A year or two before or after they left Wilroy, forced off by the Depression, I was at the beach with Roy when he met a man he had known at school. The school friend had married early and now had a son of nineteen; afterwards Roy spoke, briefly, of his regrets for what his own life might have been. Not so very many years after that, when Roy, aged about fifty, had now made something of a life of his own, he died.

I have never known the details of the agricultural leases, but when they were surrendered the land it would have reverted to the government, to be taken up again by others when times improved. When Jim Duncan and I toured the area in 1966 another Duncan, no relation, was farming at least Will’s block, with a house at the old Wilroy site identical in appearance to the old Wilroy house, but turned through 180°. We visited what had been “Poole’s” which was in the possession of a Frenchman named Gibaud, with an Australian wife and daughter (the daughter went to school in Mullewa, in a school bus – so her school-day did not end at 8 a.m. as ours had forty-five years before). When we explained our interest in visiting the place Gibaud remarked that he had indeed noticed evidence at one place on the farm of cultivation in what by then was the far distant past.

I had helped in the clearing of the paddock he spoke of. It had been gone over with a scrub-roller and probably gathered into heaps with a scrub-rake. The task now was to burn off this felled scrub. To spread the burning one had a fire-stick – a stick with one end a glowing coal, used to start a fresh fire wherever one seemed called for. When necessary, one blew on the coal to keep it burning or to make it burn hotter the better to ignite a new fire. It was at that burning-off that I suffered a burn on my lip by touching it to the glowing coal while blowing.

Also at this same time in 1966, Jim and I visited for an hour or two our cousin Donald Langridge, some years older than ourselves, who was farming the block that had been “Langridge’s”. He was shearing at the time. He had been a fitter at the Midland Railway Workshops but early in the Depression had been, I believe, laid off and had then spent some years working at Wilroy. When the rest of the Wilroy estate had been surrendered, his mother, Effie, somehow maintained title to “Langridge’s”. It must, I think, have been some years before Donald took it on. If he had done so before I went to England at the end of 1935, I feel sure I would have known of it.

I have said that on the Wilroy assemblage, more land was left uncleared than was cleared. Something similar, perhaps to a less degree, was true of all farms in the district; most of the land was in a close

approximation to its original state of around 1910, before the country was opened up. But a generation later, when Jim Duncan and I revisited it in 1966, things were very different. Researches by the State Department of Agriculture had now enabled wheat to be grown on almost the poorest land in the district, and every farm was virtually completely cleared. The former vegetation was only to be seen on roadsides and the “townsite” associated with each siding. When the country had been surveyed, railway and farmsteads all in one system, a half-mile square, 160 acres, had been allotted by each siding as a potential townsite. Even had the world stood still from 1929 on, it is doubtful whether “towns” could have developed on more than a very small proportion of these sites, but as it was, in 1966 they stood as a unique collection of conservation parks. I trust that they have remained so over the generation that has since elapsed.

Roadmaking at the farm was relatively simple. A scrub-roller was taken over the required track, succeeded I suppose by a scrub-rake, and the job was done. The land was neither boggy in the wet nor sandy in the dry and the surface was firm enough to take cart, dray or waggon, and, when their time came, motor vehicles. It must have been in the 1921 long stay that I saw a road so cut into “Poole’s”. Those 2500 acres were on the far side of the railway from the rest of the farm with its eastern boundary a mile or so from the siding, the western boundary being, in fact part of the eastern boundary of Kockatea Station. One road had already been cut directly from the siding, but this road ran at angle to that, to enter “Poole’s” near its northern end, in fact at what was to be the paddock whose burning-off I have already spoken of.

However, not all land in the district was so roadworthy. I have a memory, which I think must have date from no later than the 1917 stay, of seeing a horse, attached to a buggy, desperately struggling, the buggy axle-deep in bog – the only time I ever saw anything remotely like it in that district. And the road to Mullewa was in 1921 not without hazard. At White Stone Creek it descended precipitately to the dry bed of the creek and rose equally precipitately to the far bank. One stretch of the road, flanking “the brick house” farm at Curara (the only brick house known in the districts), was deeply rutted, unusually for those parts. It was for the Christmas holidays of 1924/25 that the rest of the party left for Wilroy a week or half a week in advance of me. Alan Willkie’s company was in town, and I stayed on to see the play we had been studying at school that year – *The Merchant of Venice*. Soon after she arrived at Wilroy, but before I did, my mother made a trip to Mullewa with all the children she had brought. There were two horses harnessed to the spring cart – somewhat unusually: perhaps a heavier load than normal was anticipated for the return journey. One horse was in the usual position between the shafts, the other beside it attached to a pair of trace chains. At this deeply rutted part of the road all would have been well had my mother ensured that the horse between the shafts was in the middle of the road: the cart wheels would then have tracked in the ruts; but she made the mistake of placing the gap between the two horses in the middle of the road. One wheel was in a rut, the other on unrutted road surface and the cart toppled over. No one was seriously hurt but some were bruised (I have never had an account of how cart and horses were righted; I wonder if my brother Cedric remembers how it was done). Arrived in Mullewa, my mother went to the resident nurse for diagnosis (there was still in those days no doctor, perhaps the reader will remember that in 1915 in Mullewa there’d been). The diagnosis was that there was nothing serious – my brother, I think it was, had broken a small bone in the upper arm. Our mother, who knew well that there is no small bone in the upper arm, forbore to comment and was grateful for the nothing-serious diagnosis, which seems to have been completely accurate.

(Alan Willkie deserves a book to himself – perhaps he has received one – in honour of what he provided many thousands of Australians, myself included. He was to Australia what the Shakespeare Wallah, of James Ivory’s film of that name, was to India.)

Not very long before we arrived in December 1920 for what was to prove a near-six-month stay, Will and Roy had completed a fence around the twelve-mile boundary of their two blocks. It was a

very good fence – strands of barbed wire and a couple of droppers between each pair of fence posts. How unusually good it was I never realized until, in 1966 in Mullewa, in the course of a conversation with a chance and fleeting acquaintance, he referred to “the barbed-wire fence”, not knowing that I would have any personal interest in it. It was a landmark nearly fifty years after it had been put up. Its purpose was to exclude from the property kangaroos and emus, capable of doing great damage to growing crops. An emu’s method of getting through a wire-strung fence is to hurl itself at it and scramble. Usually the method is successful; but this fence was a tougher barrier and usually repulsed an emu. Sometimes the bird would remain tangled in the fence and die. In those days the Mullewa Roads Board would give a bounty of half a crown for each emu head brought in, so we children in our wanderings were always attracted by a smell of corruption. I think that in the course of that half year the number of emu heads we brought into the Roads Board on our periodical visits to Mullewa must have run into double figures, or nearly so. Eight or ten half-crowns, even[ly] divided amongst four or five children, was no small amount. We always hoped that what our noses were leading us to might be a dead fox or dingo, for which the bounty was much greater – five pounds, I think – but it never was.

Some time before 1920 Will and Roy combined sheep with wheat farming (I feel sure that they had not yet done so when we had been there in mid-1917). Initially, at any rate, they had not been fortunate with sheep and by 1921 scores, perhaps hundreds, of sheep had died on the farm (from drought? from sickness?). Most of them were to be seen as so many clusters of whitened bones, some had died more recently, none very recently. We children did not think of the import of the losses these represented; to us each heap of bones, dried or semi-articulated, represented the source of a pair of knuckle-bones – astragali or “jacks”. In all we collected scores of them – purely for the sake of collecting. We had many more than amounted to a set of five for each of us; and in any case, to a group of children playing jacks only one set of five is necessary, because each child has his turn in turn. We did play a great deal of jacks in those months, the only time I have ever done so. We would run through the series: Baby Ones, Baby Twos, Baby Threes, Baby Fours; Scatter Ones through to Scatter Fours; Hold-Taw Ones to Hold-Taw Fours; and then we went on to a series of specific items the names and actions of which I no longer recall. What we never undertook was the item Feed the Crows. That involves picking the four jacks up one by one and placing each between one’s lips, the taw being in mid-air, of course, during each picking-up and placing; and then reversing the process. Our memories of the still semi-articulated sheep carcasses from which we had extracted some of our jacks precluded our doing that.

Sheep required sheep-dogs, of which there were three or four, Bella the matron among them. They were of the Australian breed known as kelpies, bread-roll coloured as are so many dogs throughout the world, most of those nondescript mongrels such as pariah dogs in India. I would have been aged fourteen or fifteen that I happened to notice one of those kelpies under the influence of strong sexual desire. One of those occasional revelations were granted to me: “That’s”, I realized, “why hot dogs are called hot dogs”. I don’t know anyone else who’s realised that, and through the years I’ve read at least two journalists wonder why, but suggesting no reason. (Certainly, in our day the “hot dogs” were always had a bright red saveloy rather than the brownish frankfurter).

Sheep-dogs required a kangaroo dog to provide food for them. That was Bounder, a large, black, sopping dog of fierce aspect. The Australian kangaroo dog is, I have heard, a cross between a greyhound and a great dane. Whether that is so or not, no better idea of it can be given than to say that in appearance it bears the same relation to a greyhound as does a Suffolk punch to a racehorse. When Bounder stood on his hind legs, looking into one’s face with his front paws on one’s shoulders, it could be, and to strangers was, a frightening experience; but in fact it was no more than a gesture of friendliness. He was capable of fast, but not sustained, bursts of speed: if he could not come up with a kangaroo in the first hundred yards or so he abandoned the chase. His method was to attack the kangaroo’s haunch, toppling it over, and then to seize it by the throat. I happened to be

taking Bounder out when he tackled his first emu using his kangaroo technique. A powerful backward kick from the emu sent him rolling and the emu escaped. He soon concluded that with emus the effective method of attack was direct to the neck.

When my mother was at the farm, kangaroos and emus provided not only dog food, but food for us as well. Young emus fed on the growing wheat crop constitute poultry of the first class. I remember also my mother's cooking and serving up the cockatoos known as galahs, of which there were great flocks. On the subject of my mother's farm cooking: once when making a curry she added methylated spirits in mistake for some other ingredient. She confided in Roy what she had done; he counselled not to tell anyone else about it, and give it a long cooking, which she gave it. At the end of the meal Will said it was the best curry he'd ever tasted. Roy had abstained from having any. On another and unusual occasion, on the day that we were taking the train back to Perth she had made some bread. It was the soggiest I have ever seen, let alone tasted, but waste was discouraged among us children and we ate it. The result was that early in the afternoon we were sitting on the luggage waiting for it and us to be taken up to the siding, and, internally feeling and externally looking, utterly miserable. Uncle Will said we reminded him of a row of dejected galahs he'd once seen, perched by a water-trough from which they'd drunk water that he'd poisoned against dingoes.

Those are the end of my accounts at Wilroy, I now turn to our living back in Perth, after having spent six months in the farm.

Of the next two years there are few memories that I can pin down to any specific time. There was a time when we boys had open-air classes in the art of tying knots, while, no doubt, the girls were taught sewing in the classroom. That must have been just after my getting back to school after coming down from the farm; my memory is of being in the middle of it without preliminaries – such a memory would not be attached to the more academic subjects, for which the preliminaries would already be with me. I do not remember that we were ever supervised by a master during this knot-work – certainly never by a mistress, and the headmaster was the only man on the staff. I suspect that the arrangement was a makeshift to get us out of the way while the girls got on with sewing, on the curriculum for them, unbalanced by any curriculum item for the boys. George Barker, I remember, was knotting himself a network hammock from strong string; presumably he must at some time been taught how to go about that. It was George Barker, who in a conscious play on words, called a certain knot a “bowline on the grid”.

“Grid”, short for “gridiron”, was very commonly used amongst boys for “bicycle”; so the bowline on the grid substituted for “bowline on the bike”. I never knew whether that also was a conscious or an unconscious distortion, of “on the bike”, for the actual name of “on the bight”.

Every day, George Barker came to school on horseback from some place far in the bush, which in those days came up to within a quarter of a mile of the school. Through the day the horse was stabled at the McEvoy's woodyard, in Second Avenue nearly back to back with our house at 70 First Avenue. I understood that he (his parents, I suppose) received an allowance from the Education Department towards the upkeep of the horse.

Some time in the second half of 1921 I was in the Children's Hospital operated on for an inguinal hernia, a result, I have always supposed, of having been shot over the horse's head on to the ground, earlier in the year.

A cultural side-light: I suppose I was about nine years old. In a group of other boys, of about the same age, I had made a statement about something or other.

“How did you know that?” I was asked.

“I read it in the newspaper”.

“Are you allowed to read newspapers?” was the surprised response of one of my interlocutors. I made no sense of the fact that he was apparently not allowed to; until some years later I realized that one of the newspapers commonly around his parents’ house must have been the notorious *Truth* (something like the *British News of the World*).

From the Fourth Standard in 1921, I passing into Fifth Standard in 1922. Both Fifth and Sixth Standards were together in the one room, both taught by the headmaster (who was by now a Mr Stephenson). That was the highest class in the school, the end of primary education. From time to time, Mr Stephenson would leave the class, they having to get along with work allotted. Well, one day, he found me not getting along the work allotted, but elsewhere in the room and engaged in some piece of horseplay. I was instantly precipitated back down into Fourth Standard. My mother felt that it was an inappropriate punishment, but she was too good an upholder of authority to allow herself to express it to the headmaster. So only next year, in 1923, did I was back in Fifth Standard.

In the Fifth and Sixth Standards, once a week we boys at Inglewood School walked the mile or so to Maylands School, where there was a woodwork shop and a woodwork master. We crossed the railway line at Third Avenue bridge; which I but no other boy, would sometimes cross, in a foolish show of bravado, by walking the narrow railing at the side. I was never competent at woodwork and for that reason (I recognize a character defect) disliked it. When at Perth Boys School the following year shortage of accommodation in the woodwork shop meant that not everybody could take part, I gladly volunteered to be one of those that didn’t.

We were given, from Fourth Standard upward I believe, swimming lessons in Crawley Baths during the summer. Once a week we marched to the corner of Second Avenue and Beaufort Street – a tramful of use, with a special tram waiting for us. In town, where Beaufort Street meets the Esplanade, there was the business of the tram staff operating the points with a crow-bar-like instrument so that our tram could swing from the one street into the other, a manoeuvre that ordinary trams never undertook. In my memory we were all singing all the way from Second Avenue to Crawley Baths; but perhaps memory exaggerates. Perhaps she misleads me too in telling me that the only songs we ever sang were “I’m forever blowing bubbles”, “Abie, my boy”, and “K-K-K-Katie”. The words we sang to this last were:

“K-k-k-katie Swallowed a n’a’p’ny
The night before that She swallowed the door-mat
And now she’s swallowed the key of the kitchen door.

It was many years before I ever knew the authentic version. From the noise singing, swells out, from time to time, the voice of Alan McBride, by far the most talented singer I knew in my boyhood. Surely he became a professional singer? The last time we met was by chance in the gallery at the Sadlers Wells Ballet in 1936, neither of us having known that the other was in England. As the tram passed the Swan Brewery, jutting out into the river half a mile short of the Baths, we were loud in our abhorrence of the smell. I think our dislike was genuine; it seemed very strange to me that my mother (indeed, a rigid teetotaller) should say that she found the malty swell of the brewery rather pleasant – as I did myself in after years. (It was much the same with Jerusalem artichokes, whose flavour I thought disgusting as a child, but in later life delectable).

In spite of all the swimming lessons, I still could not swim at the end of 1923, even though I had been on a special course on Saturdays towards the end of that 1923 – at the end of that course, the teacher summed up by saying that they had all improved “except Poole”. However, well before that I had been accustomed to dive off the diving board into the deeper water, get back into the shallow in successive jumps, taking a breath of air each jump. Finally, with no one giving me any further teaching, I was able, in 1924, to swim. But I cannot to this day swim any formally known variety of swimming. All the same, I would be as effective as the average man on the water, and better than he under the water. Nobody had told me, let alone taught me, about the methods of getting around under

water; I simply went along playing around underneath the water, and before any great time was doing it all, and very well.

In 1923, I was once more in the Fifth Standard and again being taught by Mr Stephenson – who also taught the Sixth. In the course of 1923 I absorbed all the Sixth Standard, as well as that of the Fifth Standard to which I did actually belong. About three weeks before the end of the school year, Uncle Will, who had been spending a week or two holiday with us in Perth, was going the next day to Wilroy. With him, he would be taking a copy of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, which he had bought and which I had begun reading. I spent all that evening finishing it. Next morning my mother gave him a note to Mr Stephenson, asking him to excuse me for not having done my homework, giving the reason and adding, with the force of an 18-month-old sense of injustice behind it: "which is likely to be more benefit to him than going over work he's perfectly familiar with". I did not know, until quite some time later, that she had added such a comment, but it had its effect. That day he promoted me from the Fifth Standard half of his class, into the Sixth Standard half; so three weeks later I passed out of Inglewood School and primary education, to go, in 1924 after the Christmas holidays, to the secondary Perth Boys' School in James Street.

Except for a relatively smaller school (called Perth Modern School), this Perth Boys' School was the only boys' government secondary school for Perth and suburbs (the nearest next would be "Fremantle Boys' School", around nine miles away). P.B.S. was reasonably near to me – a bit under a two-mile tram drive, not far from the centre of the town. It was only a couple of hundred yards from the Reference Library, which I soon discovered. Outside it, the Library stated that children below the age of fifteen could only be admitted when accompanied by adults, and that no children below the age of twelve should be admitted at all. However, I went into it alone before I was even twelve, which I became in June of that year; and I went there many times before I was fifteen. Fortunately, my being there was never challenged. There were no Public Libraries in Western Australia then (nor any when I left more than ten years later – when I discovered the Hampstead Public Library, my first week in England 1936, I felt it like Aladdin's Cave).

I have written that we spent every summer at Wilroy, and that is what our memory would tell, use unless we worked out what actually must of happened. In the earlier years we went to Wilroy every alternate summer, the other we spent at some sea-side place. But, of course, staying at the farm was for practically the whole of the summer holidays (or as we would say, the whole of the Christmas holidays), whereas spending at a sea-side place would be for a much shorter time – I have no memory how long, but I suppose it would be a couple of weeks. Of course, we'd be taken for individual days to coast or to river – Como, Crawley, Cottesloe, once on the upper Canning River, by Cannington, which was a family party.

The first summer must have been the first after the end of the war – that of 1918/19. We spent that at Nedlands on the Swan River. With us was Norma LANGRIDGE, aged 17 years and our oldest cousin, very, very senior to me. The only thing I remember of that holiday is that Norma and I having been in the water at Pelican Point. In fact, so little remained of that holiday, that I wonder whether it were not in the 1918/19 after all. But if so, what was done in the 1919/20 summer?

The 1920/21 summer we spent at Wilroy – and up to the winter, as I have related. In the 1921/22 summer our mother took us to South Beach, with Shirley LANGRIDGE, a few months younger than I. I remember, and enjoyed, much from that I remember, not from the time but from my mother saying so later, that during that time she took the opportunity to reinforce me on the "dozen rule" (no longer needed by children who deal only in tens and hundreds). Meanwhile Cedric, three years younger than Shirley or I, overheard and understood the facts on the "dozen rule". Which, our mother later remarked, was the earliest she realised his abilities.

We spent the 1922/23 summer at Wilroy and the following summer mother brought us to Mandurah, a tiny settlement, not the miles of suburbia that it apparently the street directory says it does today. We stayed in what, from my memory was a camp bore – at any rate, our mother seemed to be in shock at what she had left herself in for, but we children had no objections. Jim DUNCAN was the cousin who accompanied us this year. We caught a great number of fish – enough to all our needs, and we must have used them every meal. Never after that, have I ever felt a reasonable catch of fish satisfactory. Primarily, we were fishing for our next meal; but I certainly knew the thrill of a fish having been on the hook, almost certainly the same that would have been felt if it had been 30,000 years ago.

At one stage of that, I had been so badly sun-burnt that my shirt had to be cut off rather than slipped off. But strangely, although I remember that well enough, I remember no other difficulties in that or on later day. Jim, during that week or so, caught a fish-hook into his finger so that the doctor had to push the hook forward and out before then cutting at the other end of the wire which and then pulling the whole outward through the unhooked length. In those days there existed a few very large mulberry trees, I suppose about half a mile or so north of the bridge. For paying threepence one could climb and eat as much as one wanted, and, if my memory is not deceiving me, carry also as much as you wanted to. One time I had to call up a man, for why I have no memory whatever, who spoke in a way which I had read about, but had never heard: rather than dropping “h” in words with beginning it, he inserted an “h” which should simply begin with a vowel. I think I must have known it from Dickens, and I believe had dropped out. As I say, I’d never before, and I don’t think that I’ve ever heard it sense. Wandering in the bush, on the far side of the bridge, I discovered what I was convinced was a fossil human legbone – but it wasn’t.

This was the last time that our mother took us staying at the sea-side. Back now to being at my first secondary school through 1924, at Perth Boys School. As well as the Reference Library being near that school, so also was the Museum. That was familiar: my mother had brought us at least a couple of times. So, early that year, I brought my “fossil” there, to be told what it really was.

At P.B.S., the science master, who already had worked with the Sea Scouts, began in 1924 to organize another set of Scouts as a “Forest Patrol” with our headquarters in the hills, between Mundaring Weir and Kalamunda. I enjoyed all that very much; but in fact I left that after the end of that year.

I have mentioned Perth Modern School. It was unique in W.A., on the lines of an English grammar school of the ‘fifties, but necessarily with an even more restricted admission. The entrance examination was much on the lines of the “eleven-plus” examination that determined admission to the English grammar school, being even in 1924, very largely a test of I.Q. plus attainment in English and Arithmetic, but in no other subject. If one wished to take the examination, State-wide, one should be made in the twelfth year of his age. I did in fact sit and was named; so I would have gone to Perth Modern School. However, the Rev. Mr Brady, was the Chairman of Council of Scotch College and happened to be the Minister of the St Giles church to which my mother and her sons belonged. He suggested to the Principal, who had the power to award a scholarship to the son of a fallen soldier, should give it to me. So from 1925 I began at Scotch College.

Most of the above has been put together from various notes made originally around 1990. The rest of the material, from writing about swimming in 1923 to the end, was written in 1998

H.D.P. August 1998.