

Chapter VII

Migration Australia

The First Seven Years: 1967- 1974

Building Professional Profile

This period was the best of times; and the worst of times. I think I've always been in too much of a hurry? I summarised my journey out at the end of the previous chapter. Arrival and cultural adjustment were no less dramatic. I had endured and enjoyed in roughly equal measure the extraordinary vicissitudes of my immediate introduction to a new country and a new continent. Was this the journey to middle earth; or the other side of the moon? Perchance it was the latter.

I arrived in Scone, Upper Hunter Valley, NSW, late on Tuesday afternoon 4th October 1967. Following a somewhat fraught introduction in the foyer of the Australia Hotel Mrs Mace Bain had been an assiduous hostess driving her small light green sedan. She had a slightly song-song antipodean accent which I vaguely remember having heard before. Miss Wilma Strugnell from Melbourne had been one of my teachers at Ackworth School. Mrs Bain gave me a run down on what to expect during the next period of my life. She was a very different person to Mrs McRae of Strabane. I had very little idea of what to expect. We drove via Peats Ridge through the Wollombi Valley. I distinctly recall the clearly marked Convicts Drinking Trough on the trail which in those days was unsealed for much of its length. Almost concurrently I was introduced to Australia's dirt roads and its unfamiliar evergreen eucalypt bush. We had stopped for lunch at the Oak Café at Peats Ridge. Now no longer extant this was a mandatory iconic pit stop for generations of family travellers between the Upper Hunter Valley and the 'Big Smoke' (Sydney). On one occasion at a later date we shared the menu with all-time great tennis icon John Newcombe and his German spouse Angelika. They owned a hideaway chalet in the secluded valley.

Late in the evening (04/10/67) arriving in Scone I met my new boss or employer for the very first time. We had previously corresponded by aerogram; a means of communication long since defunct. Murray and Mace Bain's eldest nine-year old adopted daughter Morag opened the door to greet me. I will never forget the first meeting. This poised courteous young lady said: *'Oh, you must be Daddy's new assistant. Do come in, please sit down. May I pour you a drink?'* I was thunderstruck. In County Donegal farm children used to run away and hide when the vet arrived. They would peek out furtively from around the corner of the shed. This was indeed a new experience. 'Chivers' turned out to be a very special place. It is forever branded as part of Scone's rich colonial history. It started out in 1826 as St Aubins Arms public house or travellers' pub in the very early days. Famously or perhaps notoriously the Edward Davis Jewboy Gang raided the then pub on 21st December 1840. Some gang members crossed the road to raid Thomas Dangar's store. A young scots store-keepers clerk John Graham was shot and killed in an armed skirmish. This was the beginning of the end for the Jewboy gang. I was blissfully unaware of all this in my inauguration into Scone society. A short time later Murray Bain arrived home after a busy day in the veterinary practice. First impressions were very positive. Murray was a very fine figure of a man with an imposing slightly imperious persona. Youngest natural daughter Fiona made her appearance. Fiona was the only bridesmaid at my wedding eight years later in 1975. The Bain family were fundamental in my personal and professional development over the next seven years.



Chivers in 1968 - The veterinary practice operated out of facilities at the rear of the main homestead. Access was from the New England Highway via a road at the far right of the picture.

I stayed the first two nights at Chivers in a room at the back. For the next twelve months I boarded with Lottie and Dan Harrison in Main Street. Lottie was almost a second mother to me and a lovely lady. Amongst other things Lottie did my laundry. My board was \$12:00 per week including laundry. Dan drove the Ambulance for the Scone Ambulance service. Dan enjoyed a beer or perhaps two or three when not driving. He introduced me to the Thoroughbred Hotel. We must have seemed like the odd couple? I recall meeting rough and tough shearer Jack Cone on this debut occasion. Jack had seen better days but was never deterred. He thought with my then youthful cherubic looks I might have a better chance with the opposite sex than he currently enjoyed. He came up with a procurement plan; but it was not a good idea! Liberal quantities of Tooheys Old Beer could induce loquacity. The rules as proposed definitely favoured Jack.

I was thrust into the rough and tumble of equine veterinary practice the very next day: Wednesday 5th October 1967. However I was not released on the unsuspecting clients for a few more days. I drove with Mr Bain (Murray) on the rounds of Woodlands, Carrington, Edinglassie and Brooklyn Lodge. Timor Creek was fitted in as needed. The distances seemed immense; at least when compared to Ireland where we never exceeded twenty miles from base. Fertility work on thoroughbred mares was entirely new to me. I had listened with avid interest to a presentation by Murray Bain at the BVA Congress in Edinburgh in 1965. I was forewarned if not forearmed. There was another veterinarian employed at the practice at this time. James Crouch was on secondment from the Fred Day and Bob Crowhurst practice known as Reynolds and Partners at headquarters Newmarket, Suffolk, England. Both Fred and Bob were wartime friends of Murray's. James had won a British Horserace Betting Levy Board Scholarship to travel and study abroad. Fortuitously he chose Australia. Unbeknown to me Murray had taken part in seven (7) different veterinary partnerships in seventeen years. The last of these was terminated in 1966/1967.

Murray was left severely depleted. James' arrival was something of a godsend. He had experience on board and brought with him traditional Newmarket confidence tempered with a little arrogance. The latter would be significantly reduced by Christmas time when he left. The Hunter Valley Stud Managers and their offsidiers are extremely adroit and very well-practised at education of pommy upstarts. There were two stud circuits on alternate days; the Widden Valley circuit of Baramul and Oakleigh on Tuesdays, Thursday and Saturdays and the 'local' circuit on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Emergencies were dealt with as they arose; often with some unwelcome interruption to the stud routine. The Bylong Valley was visited on two days a week. Activity was frantic at times. Very early starts were pivotal.

The laboratory was the fundamental base of the practice. Shona Murphy had been resident bacteriologist and clinical pathologist since 1965. Her employment had caused much comment in the community and was not favoured by John Bryden and Treve Williams. Both left to join Murray's former partner Percy Sykes at Randwick in Sydney. Shona was a not unattractive blond expatriate Kiwi. Her arrival did not go without comment in the community. Murray was well known for his virile and vigorous proclivity for the opposite sex. Enid Garland was the garrulous and charming mature anchor at the helm of administration in the front office. Her assistant was the athletic neophyte Kay McGregor who later became power boat champion of Australia at the Gold Coast. Mrs Mace Bain had a more than passing interest and influence on office procedures. We shared the premises with the 'Grazcos' (Graziers Cooperative) organisation. Peter Brennan was their competent and long suffering manager. The joint venture building in Kelly Street was owned by Mrs Bain and is currently occupied by agents MacCallum Inglis.



The 'old' Bain and Associates was housed in the building now occupied by MacCallum Inglis. It was formerly known as 'Grazcos'. The hospitable Coffee Club Inn (*aka* 'Wounded Buffalo') run by pioneer gustatory entrepreneur Leighton Brudenell-Woods was in the building to the right.

On Thursday 6th October 1967 I was introduced to the Widden Valley. This was one of the defining days in my life. If the scenery around Wollemi, Scone, Woodlands and the Upper Hunter is spectacular then the Widden Valley far exceeds this approbation. We left early in the morning. With distances both the enemy and ecstasy in roughly equal proportion there is little daytime to waste. Murray drove a smart Mercedes Benz. This was new to me. I had been used to a Mini Morris. The journey to the Widden Valley via Denman and Sandy Hollow takes over one hour depending on road quality and other impediments. In 1950 there 37 gates to open! First it was mandatory to pick up the newspapers at Barton's Store & Agency in Aberdeen. They were always open; and still are! The men on the studs (they were all men then) liked the newspapers. Otherwise there was no daily delivery. A few accepted a newspaper although one knew they were illiterate. It was all part of the service. You bore the small expenditure yourself. Reciprocal reward came in other ways including hospitality.

The entrance to the Widden Valley is relatively benign. After a few kilometres however it opens up into a breathtaking visage. Spectacular is an understatement. No wonder the aborigines called it: 'Stay here, go no further.' Murray explained all this to me as we drove along. Already he had pointed out the Baerami Post Office manned by local personality Raymond Buchanan where messages could be both left and retrieved. Delivery of the daily paper was the unwritten contract and by way of reward. Raymond would sometimes stand waving his arms in the middle of the road in order 'turn the vet around' and go back to the Baerami, Widden or Bylong Valleys. Telephone exchanges relying on the old party line handle twists were *de rigueur*. It was a bush telegraph system extraordinaire. It relied on trust and no small measure of intrigue. The latter included 'listening in' to conversations which was educational, entertaining, instructive and informative. There were no secrets.



The spectacular scenery in the Widden Valley never ceases to thrill

The Widden Valley has featured much in the annals of Australia's myth and legend. It was identified as 'Terrible Hollow' in Rolf Boldrewood's iconic 'Robbery Under Arms'. Captain Starlight was reliably reputed to have made it his domain with his resourceful aboriginal female partner. Similarly 'Lady Bushranger' Jessie Hickman made it her hideout for her years of freedom. The latter at least is fact. Jessie's cave is located behind the escarpment depicted in the photograph.

Much to Murray Bain's chagrin he/we did not do the veterinary work at Widden Stud owned by the Thompson family. Erstwhile partner in practice Frank Williams did. The same applied to Holbrook Stud then owned by Bill Harris at the top of the cul-de-sac valley. There were however two marquee studs in between where Bain & Associates provided the service. Baramul was owned by Sydney Barrister A. O. Ellison. It had been the home of all-time great champion stallion 'Star Kingdom' before he died suddenly aged 22 in April 1967. Its outstanding sire son and racehorse 'Todman' was then resident there together with French importation 'Biarritz' and also the imported 'Vibrant'. Champion jockey George Moore was responsible for importing the latter. Little did I realise it then but I was mixing it with Australia's virtual thoroughbred racing and breeding royalty. Noel Hennessey was the stud groom at Baramul assisted by Queenslander John Andrews. I found the men employed on the studs to be most hospitable and welcoming. There was no 'side'. I did have a little trouble with the accents to begin with. I'm not sure what they made of me! For me Baramul was in 1967 the most aesthetically pleasing of all the magical farms we visited. It still is; although perhaps now somewhat over-developed. Murray's Mercedes Benz sedan was easy to take.

Oakleigh Stud owned by Tom Flynn was the neighbouring farm to Baramul. Tom's son Ross was the on-farm manager with wife Vass and sons John and Len; then both finishing at school. Red Gauntlet (Imp.) was the senior resident sire together with Gaul (Imp.) and an imported son of Sovereign Path. I distinctly remembered the great stayer Gaul winning the Ascot Gold Cup in front of the Queen. I could hardly believe that here was I in the presence of 'thoroughbred royalty' in the remote Widden Valley, NSW, Australia. It was all a bit much to take in!

I found the veterinary work fascinating. The aim was to optimise the chances of conception at natural service while conserving the stallion as much as possible. This also avoided time wastage in unproductive mating with little chance of success. From the employers point of view it was also economic in terms of employees' wages where their best efforts could be focused on the most important ingredients of farm management and production. The veterinary effort included the genital health of both mares and stallions. In this respect it was generally more important to ensure the reproductive components of the mares' genitalia were pristine. Murray taught me some very important lessons. Cleanliness and hygiene were paramount. If sterility was unattainable these were achievable. Attention to detail was pivotal. Perhaps the most vital message was the absolute importance and integrity of keeping adequate records. Murray was unique in this commitment. Every individual examination had to be hand written in specially designed mare books. Later I reliably estimated we had at least 1 million individual mare records. I doubt these existed anywhere else. Murray adopted a whole herd approach to health principles such as parasite control.

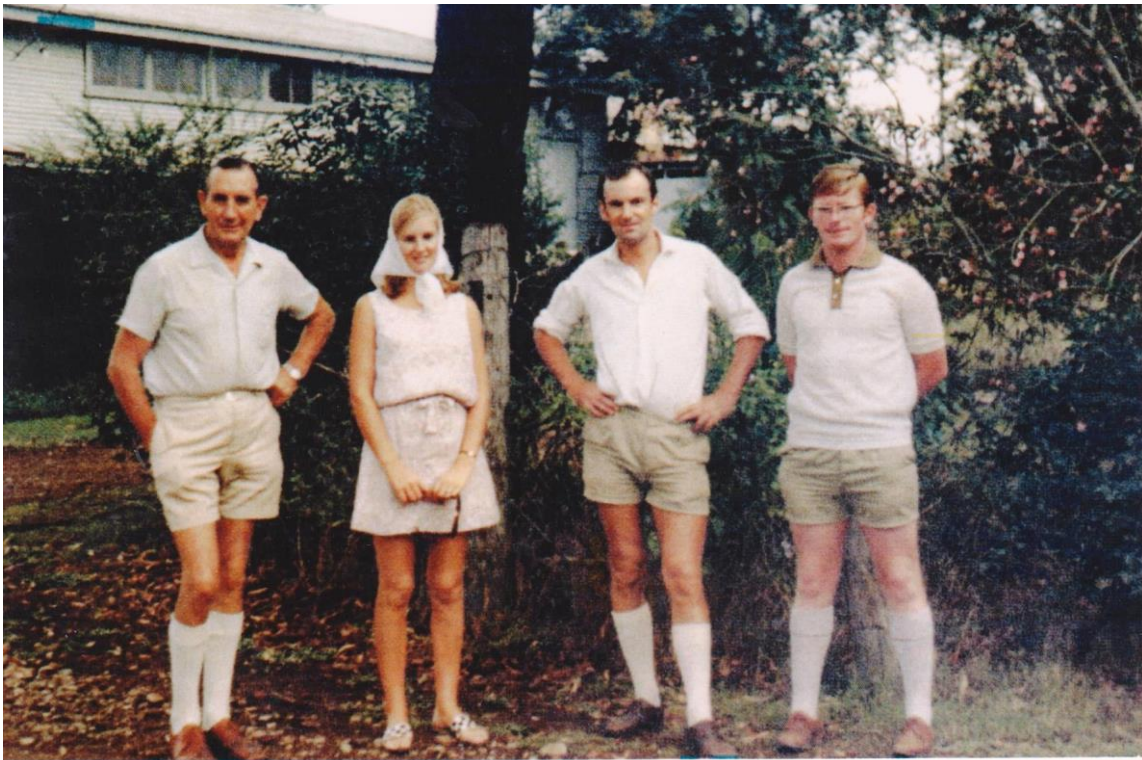
I clearly remember my very first week end in Scone. It was Saturday night at 'Chivers'. The telephone rang. Johnny Cobcroft's brilliant race gelding 'View' (Todman ex Vista Anna) had colic. 'Parraweena' is about one hour's drive north through Willowtree and onto the Warrah Plains. Brien Cobcroft's birthday party was in full swing. It was glitz and glamour plus as far I was concerned.

I had never seen anything quite like it. Brien and Jill were the co-hosts with Johnny and Denise McLaglen ('Big Red') plus Kiwi Karen Lowry as Johnny's spare (it appeared). Karen was an excellent advertisement for the Kiwi dairy industry if pectoral mammary enhancement was a totem? Sinclair and Vallee Hill from neighbouring Berwicks completed the party. I did not know it then but Sinclair was a Ten Goal Polo champion; one of only two Australians ever to achieve this ranking. I was standing in the box assisting Murray to treat 'View' and trying to look inconspicuous. Sinclair appeared at the stable door resplendent and imposing in royal blue jacket, club tie and light slacks. He had his hands in his pockets. He heard me answer Murray. *'Another effing pommy bastard'* was his snorted retort as he swivelled around to re-join the party. I was left in no doubt as to my caste and social status in my new country! 'View' recovered although Murray's initial prognosis had been guarded if not unfavourable. This was a smart tactic. You claim the credit for success. We stayed to take part in the celebrations. I was a 'fish out of water'. Murray was not! He spent most of the evening and early morning serenading Jill Cobcroft at very close quarters on the dance floor. Others took their turn. It was a wild celebration of Bacchus. I think I danced with Karen; but not at very close quarters.

This situation was wildly different to anything I experienced in Strabane or Donegal. I actually drove Murray's smart Mercedes back to Scone. By then it was daylight. All this had happened in my first two weeks. One wondered what else might eventuate? In time I came to know both the Cobcroft Brothers well. Brien won a Team Event Bronze Medal for Australia in Equestrian Competition at the 1968 Mexico Olympics. Johnny enjoyed considerable success on the race track with many relations to his good horse 'View'. Both were philanderers of the first order although Johnny eventually married long suffering and eternally patient 'Big Red'. Brien and Jill parted company and Brien remarried a neighbours' wife. Sinclair turned out to be human after all. His personal life imploded but he was extremely resilient. He endured a failed foray into politics with his so-called Australian Workers Party. My wife Sarah acted as a minder for his six children when mother Argentinian Vallee was 'indisposed'. This was a sad tale.

I met Karen Lowry in New Zealand in 1969. Her family are part of NZ sporting legend. Grandfather Tom had been an All Black and captain of NZ at cricket. His sister Gertrude ('Beety') married England (MCC) cricket captain Percy Chapman. The Lowrys owned two spectacular thoroughbred studs 'Okawa' and 'Oreka' in the rich agricultural Hawks Bay area of the North Island. 'Faux Tirage' was among the best stallions to stand in NZ since WW II.

Murray told me very early he could provide me with 10 years short cut. In other words if I listened carefully to what he said and practiced what he taught I would acquire knowledge and expertise it would otherwise take 10 years to learn by serendipity. I like to think I succeeded in this objective. Very soon under Murray's initial tutelage I became proficient in the work which I carried out for the next three decades. Developing an affinity with horses was paramount. I think this was part of my genome anyway. Never expert in the saddle I was quite proficient on the ground. With exposure to literally hundreds of thousands of individual horse examinations this was seminal to survival. I hardly recall a work place injury involving horses; certainly none serious.



Christmas at 'Chivers' 1968

Murray Bain Sue Greenwood Richard Greenwood Bill Howey

With the exception of Sue Greenwood we three veterinarians were the foundation of what was to become the Scone Equine Hospital; arguably the largest operation of its type in the southern hemisphere. The following retells the story.

Meanwhile Murray was pursuing a new strategy of employing imported ('shuttle') veterinarians from the UK mainly from his *alma mater* the Royal (Dick) Veterinary College of the University of Edinburgh. Beginning with Murray and for over 50 years veterinary graduates from this venerable academic institution have been working continuously in Scone. There have been as many as four at once at varying times. James Crouch from Newmarket spent the 1967 spring breeding season in Scone supported by a Horse Race Betting Levy Board Scholarship (UK). Bill Howey and Richard Greenwood also arrived at this time. Bill was to stay while Richard subsequently returned to a stellar career in Newmarket, UK. John Morgan 'shuttled' from that location in 1968 and emigrated permanently with his family in 1969. First Tony Parker and then Nairn Fraser with Warren McLaren made up the 'Bain Team'. The first female employees were Wendy Paul/Miller/Lapointe (locum 1971) and then Sue McCubbery (Assistant 1973). Angus Campbell also joined the fray at this time. Current Post Graduate Foundation in Veterinary Science (PGFVS) Director Michele Cotton was the initial female undergraduate student. Murray had a distinct proclivity for young, attractive and alluring females! Murray's untimely and tragic early death in March 1974 heralded the next significant era of veterinary practice during the ultimate quarter of the twentieth century.



Christmas drinks at Chivers 1972 - Bain and Associates

Murray, Mace and Fiona Bain with Nairn Fraser, Kieran Bredin (Ireland), Bill Howey, John and Rebecca Morgan and Angus Campbell in front. Morag took the photograph.

Kieran had not yet discovered the 'informality' of the Aussie Christmas. Richard Greenwood and I had committed the same *faux pas* Christmas 1968. We turned up in dark grey suits when everyone else including V. C. Bath of 'Bhima' sported flowery shirts and board shorts.

This photograph marks the high point of this era. In just over two years Murray had passed away following a prolonged battle with Colorectal Cancer. Angus Campbell married Morag in 1974. They produced their first daughter Gigha in the same year. Morag was 16 at the time. Sarah Mackay and I were the official observers in the civil marriage ceremony conducted by incumbent magistrate Bill Hall in the Scone Court House. We were not to know it at the time but about twelve months later we were married by Rev Brian Druery in the garden at 'Tinagroo'. We also 'doubled' as first time Godparents for Gigha Campbell.

Culture Shocks

Culture Shocks represent a slightly embellished and mildly enriched record of my initial impressions of veterinary practice in Scone, NSW Australia. It was quite an immersion shock therapy type of introduction having left NW Ireland on the last Thursday in September 1967 and commencing in Scone the first Tuesday in October 1967 after a prolonged migration flight via the USA and the wide Pacific Ocean. I wrote about some of these in my 'Infinitive History of Veterinary Practice in Scone'. I would not write them in such a way now. The following is a synopsis of these first impressions. Already I have described meeting people so diverse as Mace Bain, Morag Bain, Murray Bain, the Cobcroft brothers and significantly Sinclair Hill. I doubt the latter remembers?

Culture Shock 1

There was a massive contrast in attending a difficult calving in Donegal compared to Kars Springs. In Ireland a small herd of cows was watched with ferocious intensity under very close scrutiny. The slightest cause for alarm was investigated immediately. If this included veterinary intervention then the veterinarian was expected to be there in 30 minutes; or less. Every type of urgent assistance was ready such as people power, buckets of warm water, soap and towels. The iconic and laconic soldier settler from Brawboy, Scone was of a different hue. The economy of cattle farming was very different. Drought prevailed and cattle prices were in the nadir trough of the boom/bust cycle. His expectations of the unlikely call for veterinary assistance were in proportion. It was a salvage operation at best. I also recall a 'Saturday night fever' journey between calls. I traversed the 100 miles between Ameroo Santa Gertrudis Stud, Warrah Ridge and Woodlands Stud, Denman in record time!

Culture Shock 2

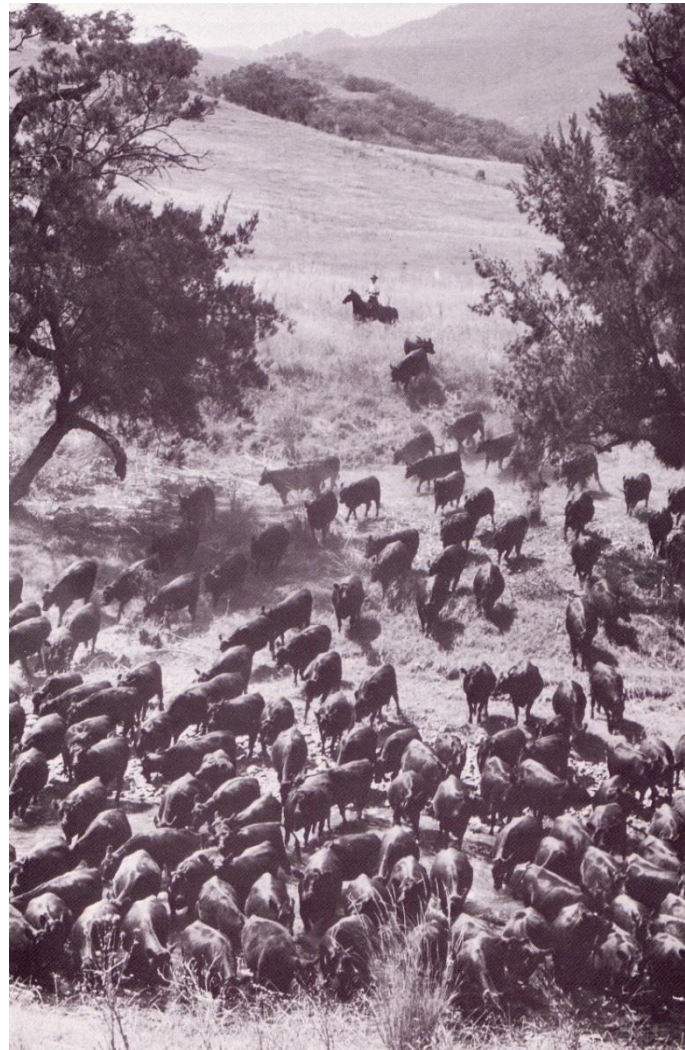
My most enduring rose coloured memories of my early life in Scone are centred round the very real privilege of providing a veterinary service to the unique and special stud farms in the Widden Valley. I've already elaborated in my introduction. Only 1.5 hours' drive away this is the fabled 'Terrible Hollow' of Rolf Boldrewood and 'Robbery under Arms' fame. Murray Bain used to refer to it as 'Peyton Valley' after Peyton Place the legendary American small town sitcom. There were so many episodes of extreme human melodrama some of it quite tragic. Old Billy Miller knew the cause. If you drink the Widden Creek water you go mad; stick to rum only and you'll be OK!

Part of the unwritten creed also included a veterinary service to the animals owned by the inhabitants of Baerami Creek "while you're passing through" (i.e. *Gratis!*) on your way to and from the Bylong and Widden Valleys. Occasionally the handling facilities were egregious and the situations startling.

Culture Shock 3

One of the most striking contrasts on coming to work at Scone was Belltrees. Belltrees was and is the ancestral home of the White family. The original pioneer James White came originally to Australia from Somerset in 1826 as custodian of 79 valuable French merino sheep destined for the Australian Agricultural (AA) Company. The AA Company was soon to begin its vast expansion throughout the colony of NSW from its base on the north shore of Port Stephens. In 1967 Michael and Judy were respectively patriarch and matriarch at Belltrees and parents of an impeccable family.

Equally impressive was the home herd of magnificent Aberdeen Angus Cattle carefully selected for the very best breed traits over successive generations. Their acclimatised situation in Australia astounded me having been accustomed to the softer 'Border' variety of the farms in the Tweed Valley between Roxburghshire and my ancestral home in Northumberland. I think I'll let the photographs tell the story.



Aberdeen Angus Cattle on Belltrees

Courtesy of Dr Judy White AM PhD.

Excellent whole herd management and extensive husbandry were in stark juxtaposition with the excellent farms in the border country of the Tweed Valley between Scotland and England. That was my familiar home turf. The Belltrees experience was a whole new ball game. The individual cow almost didn't matter. I was stunned when Michael commanded that a clearly 'sick' cow should be shot rather than treated. The weak were culled. Charles Darwin would have approved. However I discovered there was a lot of close connection between the two apparently disparate systems. Michael White had judged Aberdeen Angus cattle at the Royal Highland Show. He also knew Sir Alfred Goodson of the College Valley very well. It's a small world after all.



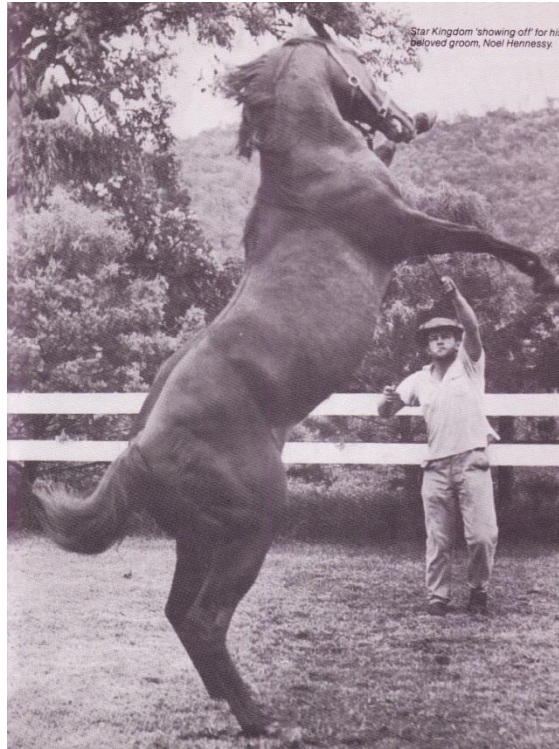
Running in the stock horses at 'Belltrees'

Laurence Le Guay; photograph courtesy of Dr Judy White.

Culture Shock 4

I'll leave this anecdote as it was originally. I flatter myself changes might diminish the impact. Inevitably there is some repetition.

I was riding with Murray at his behest determined to learn all I could and quick! I had never met Murray Bain but had seen him deliver paper at the BVA Congress in Edinburgh. It was with a mixture of trepidation, awe and reverence I ventured forth in my very new and pristine environment. I don't know what I expected but Scone looked to me like a Hollywood Western film set. The spectacular steep sandstone hills in the Widden Valley appeared to me to possibly harbour Geronimo and his braves! I had not yet discovered Captain Starlight! Inured to a class ridden culture which at least displayed a thin veneer of superficial respect for highly qualified professionals imagine my surprise on arrival at Baramul to find no obsequious welcoming party at the mare yards! I remained silent, made no remark and passed no judgment. Eventually there emerged on horseback two caricature baddies straight out of Warner Brothers. With at least three days' stubble and worn but clean 'uniform' the only missing apparel were the twin Colt 45's. They both dismounted and hitched their steeds to the rail. John Andrews went to the water tank for a drink. Legendary Star Kingdom Stud Groom Noel Hennessey proceeded to the Doc's car, (a Merc) opened the door, helped himself to the daily paper and read the racing results. "You're late you (expletive deleted) old bastard" were the first dialectal words I heard spoken in the Valley! So much for professional reverence down under!



‘Baddy’ Noel Hennessy and Star Kingdom

Photograph courtesy of *the Thoroughbred Press*.

Noel and John were guilty of a little humorous deception at Murray’s expense sometime earlier. Murray was meticulous in everything he did. His veterinary gear in his car was immaculate as were his sparkling white overalls, towels and most importantly record books in which he immediately wrote the results of every examination he ever made. (I counted >1 million examinations in the practice at one stage). Unpacking the car on arrival was an elaborate procedure and followed a very regular military pattern. The whole process took over 10 – 15 minutes. Murray was vain and proud and had attained very high army rank serving with HM forces in the Middle East and North Africa. On one occasion he was not surprised to find anyone at the Baramul yards and unpacked as usual. Still no one appeared. He read the paper. He checked his watch. He walked around. He checked his watch. He looked about. He checked his watch. At last he decided there must be some mistake so packed everything up again with the same exact precision as the unloading process. He was just about to drive away when two cheeky faces appeared above the old empty water tank by the cattle race! “G’day Doc, nice day?” may or may not have sounded sweet to his ears. I have no record of his response!

Noel was also the original author of the famous quotation of the relationship between veterinary income, ‘bugs’ and big time investment. With remarkable prescient percipience Murray had established the very first private diagnostic veterinary laboratory in the country. In 1965 Shona Murphy arrived to take up duties as resident bacteriologist and clinical pathologist in Scone. Very soon popular and scientific names of common equine pathogens became very familiar around the studs. *Beta-haemolytic Streptococcus* was conveniently and with very sound reason shortened to BHS. This prevented the embarrassment of ‘literacy’ exposure not least with the veterinarians.

Jim Capel from Barraba nearly choked on the telephone on receiving a report from us his mare had the long form version of the disease! I only just managed to calm him down and explain! The bull market corporate giant of Australia at the time was the 'Big Australian' Broken Hill Pty. Ltd. or BHP. It did not take the very droll Noel to cotton on that "Murray should rename BHS to BHP he's made so much money out of it!" Murray may have said about someone else: "Cheeky bastard!"

Culture Shock 5

The unique Australian accent and enunciation must have had their origins from the type of people with whom I had been used to dealing. The soft Donegal intonation, the harsher strident Tyrone argot and the rolling vowels of my native Northumbria all contributed to the unique antipodean pronunciation. Similarly the lowland Scots diction left its mark as did my favourite 'Geordie'. It's always intrigued me how Burke and Wills may have communicated? I considered I had acquired a generally well-rounded exposure to varying degrees of elocution in English. I had listened to wireless broadcasts of Test Cricket and compared the starkly contrasting tones of Alan McGilvray with the very 'beeb' renditions by Brian Johnston ('Jonners') and earthy doyen John Arlott. A Brisbane colleague was intrigued to discover I knew of Vulture Street just outside the 'Gabba'! As a very small boy I distinctly remember John Arlott: "and its Trueman running in from the Vulture Street end"! My father rather unsuccessfully tried to imitate the distinctive call of "No" in 'strine'! It sounded like a not too convincing nasal "now"! Ken Howard and 'Fag' completed my down under etymological education not long after arrival.

In the halcyon swinging sixties it was still *de rigueur* to listen to the races on a Saturday afternoon. Indeed there was little else to choose! Commercial radio was new to me with its tinny tunes and jingling advertisements. Ken Howard was the legend! I was transfixed by his accuracy and bemused by his speed at calling a race! It was a different story when I tried to follow the progress of my selection! With a degree of unfounded prudish intellectual snobbery I considered I had a smattering of French. I backed a horse called Arc En Ciel by Faux Tirage (NZ). The race was well and truly over before I recognized Arkenseel had indeed run a place and his sire was Forkstirrage! Ken Howard deferred to no one with his Darlinghurst inspired brand of French pronunciation! I thought Arc En Ciel must have been scratched or left at the barrier!

'Fag'Farrell was another story altogether! A great bloke and one of my trusted and valued friends, he also "talked the talk" as he "read the chalk"! Literate written interpretation sometimes presented a problem especially with trans-Tasman names. Murray was always a stickler for exactitude in record keeping especially correct spelling. "Can You Eat a Pie" sounded a funny name for a horse in 'Fag-speak' – so much so I thought I should inquire further. I asked for the identification papers. 'Fag' was right! Kanhui Tae Pai must have been Maori for the same thing! "Tall Haemorrhoid" also stretched the limits of credibility and imagination! Taille Emeraude was a French bred mare at Holbrook and Alan Harris read it differently! Sam Cross was born and raised on Edinglassie. He never left. Stud master Alan Morrisby owned a grey French mare "J'attendrai". Sam would not have recognised the English spelling let alone the French. He had no problem with either recognition or pronunciation. 'Shit-on-Grey' was good enough for Sam. It was actually a most apposite description. She was a rather dirty looking entity.