

The Victorian School of Forestry

The State of Victoria established a school for forest officers in 1909-1910, at Creswick, to be housed in the buildings of the former goldfields hospital, built in 1863. At the start, the students lived in Tremeame House, a two-storied family home of some pretensions built in the lower grounds by Dr John Tremeame in the early 1880s. All the main hospital buildings on top of the hill did not become available to the school until the end of 1912, when the last patients were moved to the new cottage hospital, near Calembeen Park. A three-year diploma course was developed to train young men for service in the State forests department.

The School Motto

The School motto was *Circumspice*, explained as "Look around you", which described well the enquiring alertness and habits of careful observation to which we should aspire. Some liked to relate the motto to *Si monumentum requiris, circumspice*, attributed to the son of Christopher Wren, but "If you seek a monument, look around" seemed apt for old foresters at the close of their careers, not for mere novices.

The School and the Forests Commission

When it was formed in 1919, the Forests Commission assumed responsibility for the School. Every year, the Forests Commission invited boys about to finish, or who had recently finished, secondary schooling to apply for a forestry scholarship tenable for three years.

The Commission, a body corporate of three members, was responsible for running the affairs of the State Forests Department, being in turn responsible to the Minister of Forests under the provisions of the Forests Act. The Act referred to the school as the School of Forestry, Creswick. The iron gates at the main entrance carrying the words Victorian School of Forestry were installed some years later.

The Forests Act provided for the Commission to award traineeships. This allowed the Commission to secure an annual intake of base-grade diplomate foresters to the staff of the State Forests Department. It was the sole forestry employer of diplomates in Victoria until 1948 when two cadets of Australian Paper Manufacturers Ltd had completed their three-year course. The Commission set the number of trainees commencing the course, and operated the School independently of the Public Service Board although it took the advice of a Board of Forest Examiners (later the Board of Forestry Education). The Act provided the Commission with a Forestry Fund into which were paid half the revenues from the sale of forest produce and fees for licences. Money from the Fund could be spent on a broad range of activities specified by the legislation. This allowed the Commission to fund parts of the operation of the School through its own decisions if and when funds from other sources were insufficient. This was up to the Commission alone, and allowed it to sustain, until the end of the 1970s, a vision of a well-trained staff in the field and at head office to protect and manage the State forests in the public interest, according to scientific principles and responsible practice.

When a class of trainees was about to finish the course, the Commission applied to the Public Service Board for a certificate authorising appointment of exactly that number of new foresters. This device was the envy of other authorities and departments, which had to submit detailed proposals to the Public Service Board and argue for approval of new positions on their establishments. The Commission was able to employ this recruiting procedure until the end of the 1970s.

The Scholarship

The scholarship offered free tuition for a three-year course in forestry, free board and lodging at the School, and, upon successful completion of the course, appointment to the professional division of the Victorian Public Service. Each trainee was entitled to four return rail fares home per year - for the three term vacations and for the Easter recess. Trainees received no living allowance.

Before taking up a scholarship, each trainee and his surety had to sign a bond to serve in the Victorian public service for five years after finishing the course. This meant in the State Forests Department because very seldom did any other agency require a trained forester. The amount of the bond in 1946 was £100.

The current brochure about a career in forestry said the commencing salary of a junior assistant forester was £156 year, providing a neat £3 per week. By the time the 1948 diplomates were appointed to the staff, in January 1949, the salary had been increased.

A scholarship to Creswick relieved parents of the burden of fees and board during whatever alternative course their son may have followed, and the promise of interesting and secure employment until age 65. There were good prospects of promotions for those who did well, and a State pension at the end. All this appealed to youths and parents who had experienced the depressed 1930s and the uncertainties of war from 1939 to 1945.

The Applicants

The applicants for 1946 were all from Victoria, and were boys or young men. Women would not be students at the School until the mid-1970s.

For these school-leavers who competed for scholarships in 1946 the widespread fires and deaths in 1943-44 were fresh in our minds, and, even if we lived in the city, most of us could recall tales of the loss of life and destruction in the fires of 1939. I remember the fierce winds and the smoke over the suburbs. We were aware of the Save the Forests campaign, which had been formed at a public meeting in Melbourne in 1944, and had secured the active support of government agencies and generated a popular forest conscience for forest protection and tree planting. A sentiment for conservation of natural resources was stirring. Forestry satisfied a call to serve the community, protecting its forests from fire, uncontrolled uses and alienation from the public estate.

I had met a forester. One of the teachers in primary school was the mother of a field forester, whom she invited to speak to us one day. He was tall and spoke quietly about his work and the places where he had been stationed. That was before the 1939 fires: he finished at Creswick in 1934, and I would say we met him in 1937 or 1938. I doubt whether his talk had any influence on my doing forestry, although in later years he told me that he thought it might have. It turned out that I my first district posting was to his district. That was in the autumn of 1949, after I had worked for a few months on forest assessment. Of course he had no inkling at the time that I had been one of the youngsters in his mother's class.

Selection

Those whose applications and references were satisfactory were invited to do written tests in English, Arithmetic, Geography and General Knowledge, all held on the one day in a Victorian Railways Institute room on an upper floor of the Finders Street railway station. These tests were quite easy. About 80 applicants from various parts of Victoria assembled for them, eying one another speculatively.

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Of that field, some 20 were invited to present themselves for interviews by the Board of Forest Examiners at the State Public Offices in Treasury Place. Waiting past the appointed time was a tense 40 or so minutes. The interview was solemn and polite. Old men sat around a large rectangular table, asking questions apparently at random. The standard answer to the question, "Why do you want to be a forester?" (then and until the late 1970s) was "For the open air life".

After interview, we were instructed by the secretary to the Board, an administrative officer from the State Forests Department, to return at a certain time late in the day, to hear the Board's selections for the year. We stood around in the space outside the lift in front of a counter, waiting and not talking much. There was a rumour that one applicant had gone off home, convinced he had done badly at interview. The secretary came out from the inner office, and said he would read the names of the successful boys: the others could go. Carefully, he read out nine names. The disappointed applicants melted away, down the brown stairway or into the lift.

The Board did not allocate the scholarships, but recommended a final list to the Commission. The three Commissioners of Forests were members of the Board, and no doubt exercised as much influence on the recommended list as they thought prudent. Members included the Director of Education for Victoria, and academics in The University of Melbourne. The Vice-Chancellor of the University himself was a member in the late 1940s. His membership reflected the desire of the Commission to maintain close ties with The University, to which a few of its most promising foresters went on to complete a science degree. The academic members were ostensibly appointed as fit and proper persons, not as representatives of their university departments - botany, physics, chemistry and geology.

Kitting Out

The student from Daylesford in our number had probably been to Creswick, but the rest of the 1946 intake had no prior knowledge of what we would need. In those days the School held no Open Day. I do not imagine my parents thought of visiting the School before my application, and there was no time after the interviews. Few applicants had ever met a field forester. Unless he had been a Scout, city boys may not have walked far in a forest.

Clothing and equipment on a list issued by the Secretary had to be got together, at fairly short notice. This list was not amended until about 20 years later, and has been the butt of items in newsletters over the years.

Rationing coupons were necessary to buy new clothes, until mid-1948. Calico bed-sheets were specified. What kind of shirt did one buy for fieldwork in a forest? Why were jodhpurs and leather leggings required? The specified set of drawing instruments was hard to find in post-war Melbourne. At least there was no doubt about how many singlets, socks, and so on must be brought.

Arrival

New schoolboy students

The Melbourne boys, of whom I was one, had been issued with vouchers for travel to Creswick on a specified evening in February. We learned that the Mildura Express was a train popular with fruit-pickers, a rowdy lot. The train stopped at Creswick about 11.00 p.m.

We tumbled on to the platform with our suitcases and baggage, and looked around. What now?

The VSF - 1946 to 1948

Alan Eddy

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A third-year student who happened to travel on that train introduced himself and said there was nothing for it but to walk to the School.

Through the town and over Creswick Creek to the front gateway. The 90-foot ascent to the main building was a steady climb. Eventually we gathered, a little bewildered, in the library, while the senior went off to tell the resident Principal of our arrival. The School was in darkness: there was no other student there that night. Arrangements were awry. It must have been after midnight when the Principal entered the library, blinking in the doorway. He gazed around and said, "You're not here, you don't arrive until tomorrow".

We were told to find ourselves a bed. Guided by the senior, we scattered into the dormitories, found enough blankets for the night and were soon asleep.

There was no hot water, but a couple of spartans had showers in the morning before we helped ourselves to the cereal and milk someone had provided in the kitchen, the huge room which had served the hospital from 1863 until the hospital moved to a new building in the town in 1910.

There was no sign of the Principal or other staff, and the senior seemed to have disappeared for the day.

I forget what we did for food, and whether any kitchen staff put in an appearance. We must have been instructed during the day about which dormitories to occupy that night.

Not knowing if we would be summoned at any moment, we stayed close to the main buildings all the morning but in the afternoon ventured to walk about in the grounds, observing the names on trees and shrubs and peering in the windows of an empty two-storey red brick house in the lower grounds.

Some of us looked around the library for a while.

I suppose we finished the day a little puzzled by our reception at the School, but we were cheerful enough, getting to know our fellows and enjoying our first day, calm and sunny, at our new home.

Ex-servicemen

The first post-war intake of students included five men discharged from the armed services and who had elected to study forestry under the rehabilitation scheme which provided them with a weekly allowance, a book allowance and perhaps other benefits. They got more than £4 a week from the Commonwealth taxpayer, and no doubt deserved it.

They arrived some days later than we boys. One had been in the Navy, two in the Air Force, and two in the Army. Their arrival made the 1946 intake the biggest in the history of the School, and it included men with experiences scarcely dreamed of by schoolboys. One of the army men withdrew from the course within a few days, ostensibly put off by his first fieldwork at the State Nursery - sifting earth by hand for potting seedlings. He went to The University and became a veterinarian.

Returning students

A few of the returning students arrived late in the day, presumably by bus from the Ballarat railway station or via Daylesford. The remainder came on the Mildura Express and generally were peeved to find the juniors already at their School, and in bed.

Pecking order

We were promptly told by the seniors and intermediates (second-year) students that juniors needed to learn their place, and learn it well. We had to address them as "Mr", even at sports. It was novel to call "Your serve, Mr Caldwell" to a second-year student. The "Mr" rule was soon dropped, when the schoolboy juniors had learned their due place; the ex-servicemen objected and did not toe the line.

In the library there was a cabinet wireless and any junior listening to it was required to give up a chair near it when a senior or intermediate wanted it. They also had the right to tune into a different station, wherever they were sitting.

In the dining room there was a square senior table, a long intermediates/juniors table, and two small square tables to accommodate the rest of the juniors. Seating was fixed, for convenience and because butter was rationed and each student's issue of butter on a saucer was placed before him at breakfast and tea. We had to make a wooden marker with our name and any decoration we wished to stick into the butter on our saucer. The butters were put away in the cupboards of a large sideboard inherited from the old hospital. Each week's issue was supposed to be the national ration less what was needed in the kitchen for cooking. If a student used butter very sparingly his saucer could contain two weeks' pieces plus a remnant on top. One student who often achieved this learned that unrefrigerated butter could go rancid. Some students ate all their ration in three days.

The Senior Student said Grace before dinner and tea. Dinners were distributed by waitresses, starting with the lecturer on duty, and finishing with the juniors. All students rose together when the Senior Student and the head table did so to signal the end of the meal, and we filed out of the dining room. Too bad if the last-served juniors had not finished eating their pudding at dinner or bread and jam at tea.

Distinctions within a year were decided by birth date. This rule allowed no argument, and was certified in the application for a scholarship. The range of ages of the schoolboy entrants within a year was relatively narrow, as would be expected. In 1946 it was about two and a half years. I became 17 a few days after we arrived, and was third from the bottom of the class. Class lists for rosters and all other purposes were written out in order of age, an order which old men in 2003 can recite without hesitation.

The mixture of ex-servicemen and schoolboys was a mixed blessing for the latter throughout the course. This post-war blend must have introduced benefits and problems for staff and students at schools and colleges, and in Melbourne's only university at the time.

The Senior Student

There was a senior of each year, and the senior of the third year was Senior Student of the School. He compiled the fieldwork rosters, liaised with the Principal, and was powerful. The realities of public service hierarchy were built into the School.

Student Council

All the students met regularly as a council, making decisions or requests to the Principal regarding student affairs. During 1946 the voting values allotted were: senior 3, intermediate 2, junior 1. Not only did this rub in the lowliness of juniors, it ensured that "experience" prevailed. It was never a students' representative council: all belonged and attended meetings.

Initiation

We were initiated into the School a couple of nights after the ex-servicemen arrived. We were dragged out by yelling intermediates and seniors, and loaded on to the 3-ton Chevrolet tray truck. Around and around we went along roads and tracks before ending up at the back doorway of Tremearne House. We were pushed into a black cellar, in which there was water, about 100 mm of drainage water. We sat on the wooden stairs or stood waiting until hauled out one by one. I was left with one other, after what seemed like an hour's wait. Plaintively, he asked me whether I would mind him going next, for he did not wish to be left alone in the cellar. I gladly agreed and wondered what was in store.

In a dark room, holding a lighted candle near my chin, I was quietly interrogated by the Senior Student and others, endowed with a nickname related to surname or initials, and then it was over.

So we were initiated into a unique fraternity. The ex-servicemen did not think much of the initiation ceremony, but tolerated what was required of them.

Numbers of Students

The number of students in 1946, 1947 and 1948 were as follows.

	Yr 1	Yr 2	Yr 3	Total
1946	13*	12	12	37
1947	15	12	12	39
1948	12	15	12	39

* One went on sick leave and resumed his first year in 1947. Omits the ex-soldier who left after a few days.

Buildings

Old Hospital

The goldfields hospital, on healthy ground high on Eastern Hill, provided the central accommodation.

It faced west, and comprised the entrance hall and to either side the two main wards of the hospital. These had been Nightingale wards, named after the hospital reformer who died the year that forestry students first occupied them. The long Nightingale wards had a fireplace at one end and a nurse's station at the entrance. When the fragile linoleum was rolled up every December to expose the wooden floor for the Annual Dance one could make out the positions of the two rows of beds, fourteen each side from memory. The former ward to the right of the hall was the museum, and the main classroom was to the left.

There was a telephone on the wall in the back passage of the main building, at the foot of the stairs leading to the quarters occupied by the Housekeeper and one or two of the domestic staff. It was a wooden "Ericsson" made in the early 1900s. The operator at the exchange in the Creswick Post Office responded to a gentle half-wind of the handle at the side. We entered calls in a notebook kept by the phone, and paid for them once a month. A trunk-line call home to Melbourne or elsewhere was a rare event, and we had little need to make local calls. Trunk calls were timed in three-minute intervals by the local operator, who could be generous if she felt inclined.

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The south wing was occupied by three or four small wards and storerooms. The north wing contained the library, dining room and the kitchen. The library had been extended to the north during the war, that section formed an attractive common room. The dining room, with its king post roof, could be noisy at the evening meal. Students did not enter the kitchen.

The east wing completing the quadrangle contained three three-bed dormitories - formerly small wards. At the south end was a store room with skylight, the former operating theatre. A small brick structure between it and the Principal's house provided the School office.

There was a disused underground tank, domed with bricks and cement, in the quadrangle just behind the two storey part of the main building. There was a corrugated iron tank on a tall metal stand, but no sign of a pump to elevate water.

New Dormitories

Two wooden dormitories had been built just outside the quadrangle and partly behind the east wing, each comprising three dormitories and a shower room. They were unheated, electric radiators being forbidden. The large junior dormitory had eight beds and some shared the chests of drawers crammed in. Four or even five beds would have been a reasonable limit. There was little room to move between some beds.

Tremearne House

This two storey brick house had been built in the early 1880s by the chief doctor at the hospital, and had been the most imposing residence in Creswick.

Downstairs the billiard room, extended in recent times, had become the botany lab. The adjoining consulting room and patients' entry served as storage spaces. The drawing room, on the same side of the building, was the Board room. It was not used during the year, except by the Principal for a small group of outsiders which occasionally met in the evening. It was furnished with a large blackwood table and chairs, and sideboards from the former hospital, and had a large patterned rug on the wooden floor. An impressive room, duly swept and dusted every Saturday of term.

On the other side of the front hall the former dining room served as a mapping and drafting room, being used spasmodically. Near that was the breakfast room (the senior lecturer's private lab and preparation room), former pantries, and the empty kitchen. One large pantry was used to store many samples of eucalyptus oils which had been analysed and evaluated over many years. There were lab sinks and other equipment, not used after the war.

Upstairs, the main bedroom housed the herbarium. An external door led to the wide upstairs verandah overlooking the lower grounds and Creswick Creek. The second bedroom was the geology lab, with its mineral and rock collections and wooden models of crystal types. The other rooms were used as a soils lab and for storage. At the end of the passage were the bathroom with its huge bath on cast iron legs on lead-sheet flooring, and the lavatory. Outside the wall, the cast iron outlet from the water closet connected into a lead pipe shaped into sweeping S-bend before iron pipe took the waste underground. This was said to have been the first water closet west of Melbourne.

The tweeny maid's room ("between stairs" off the landing) was a locked store, a sort of mystery room.

An outbuilding at the rear provided the School forest office, where maps and plans and records of timber utilisation were kept, and where applicants for firewood licences could come on Saturday mornings in

winter. This had been an ironing room, and was next to the former wash house. A wood room and a water closet completed the outbuilding.

Wood Technology Laboratory

Close by was the wooden wood technology lab, recently completed. This building comprised a basement used for storing large wood specimens and the fire pumps held at the School for training. The upper floor, covering some 50 square metres, was furnished with a long bench with sinks under the west-facing windows, microscope cupboards, demonstration bench and specimen racks. The fireplace at the far end was wide enough to take 5-foot wood. The story was that the Principal had visited the Board of Works chalet near Wallaby Creek, had been impressed by its huge fireplace and had contrived to imitate it in the new lab. The lab was poorly insulated and stood well down the shaded slope, where the frosts were thick. Practical classes were best arranged in the afternoon, despite the disadvantage of direct sunshine into the eyes and microscopes when the sun was low.

Chemistry and Physics Laboratories

The chemistry and physics labs occupied a wooden building on the brow of the slope to the north away from the main building. We were told that the first chemistry lab had burnt down about 1930, due to a student's carelessness. The chemistry lab was equipped mainly for the wet-way qualitative analysis that formed most of the practical work. The fume cupboard was not too effective and we were prodigal with hydrogen sulphide, which some of us blamed for headache by the end of an afternoon.

Workshops

Just east of the chemistry lab stood a high, much older galvanised iron building, its unlined walls formed by rippled iron sheets. The nearer end was used for table tennis. The carpenter's shop, outside which under a lean-to roof was an electric rip-saw bench, occupied the remainder of the building. There was a good array of hand tools and two carpenter's benches. The outside saw was used from time to time to cut pine or messmate boards from small logs. When a student took a fancy to some blackwood or native cherry on the firewood block, the log was brought in, and the green sawn timber stacked in the open space under the workshop to dry, until the owner wanted to make something or give the boards to another woodworker.

The forge adjoined the petrol store in a wooden shed just below the chemistry lab. Petrol was pumped from a 44-gallon drum with a quart-stroke pump. No one seemed concerned that the forge and petrol store were unsafe neighbours.

Studies

Study rooms and cubicles were variously allocated. Some were in the south wing of the main building, three or four on the ground floor of Tremeame, and many were in two long Army huts which arrived in dirty condition from Puckapunyal early in 1946, to provide study space. The huts were set on wooden stumps near the wood heap. It was a big job cleaning up the huts. They were already partitioned into spaces, which we used in pairs. These uninsulated huts were heated with "Backwoodsman" stoves, rectangular not pot-bellied. Most of the heat came from the exposed metal flue. It was possible to stoke up the roaring stove on a very cold night so that the lower length of the flue glowed red. [One and a half of the huts were burned down one winter's evening in 1960. The fire started while the students were at tea. The presumed source of the fire was an overheated "Backwoodsman" stove which had been well and truly stoked up shortly before the meal. The loss of students' notes and possessions, and of books and other materials from the library,

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was substantial. The Creswick fire brigade and students using fire hoses from hydrants did a good job saving the huge firewood stacks nearby, as well as half of one hut].

Staff Houses

The Principal's house, adjacent to his office and at the entrance to the quadrangle, used to be the nurses' quarters. The designation of the house was R7 (Residence 7 on the Department's register of houses in the State), and it is still known to University personnel there today as building R7. The Principal and his wife would have been disturbed very little by noise from students. No record players, and only three or four mantel radios were in dormitories. Times were such that a student financially able to obtain a radio set first asked the Principal's permission to have it. Of course there were occasions when a rumpus attracted the Principal in the evening, but his approach was quickly signalled.

The senior lecturer and his wife lived in a cottage on the rise above the School clothes lines. He told us it had been built for them for £300, about 1930, when he married, [They continued to occupy it until he retired from the Principal's position at the beginning of 1969.]

The lecturer's house stood on the site of an old tennis court, down slope from the forge and truck garage. He and his family had a pleasant outlook over the creek and the northern part of the town, but the site drained poorly in a long wet spell.

In my student days I went into the lecturer's house only once, one evening to play the card game Solo.

School Forest and Plantations

Hardwood forest and pine plantations almost adjacent to it had been set aside for management by the School. There students could gain practical skills, demonstrate various silvicultural activities, and collect specimens for study. For our three years we were able to watch regenerating pines and eucalypts, to experience the four distinct seasons, to observe birds and other animals, collect specimens for botany, geology, pathology and entomology, to practise surveying, and to develop a sense of feeling at home in forests. Compartments of radiata pine of various ages from 1924 or even earlier provided plenty of scope for forest mensuration and pine pruning exercises.

Engineering and utilisation exercises and taught us team work and organisation, and provided the firewood and miscellaneous timbers needed by the School.

A koala refuge had been fenced off in the forest earlier in the 1940s, and stocked with koalas brought from Phillip Island. Some had escaped, the beginnings of a small population that dispersed throughout the hardwood areas. Two emus roamed the "park", having been introduced to add interest for visitors.

Trial plantings of many conifers and some exotic hardwoods along and near Oak Glade near the State Nursery provided additional specimens for forest botany After a storm the first one on the scene could score one or two prized cones under the few tall Coulter pines.

Staff

Teaching staff

There were three resident teaching staff; the Principal, the senior lecturer, and a lecturer. The Principal had been there since 1927, and his deputy since 1928.

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A single forester was posted from District work for several months to help with teaching. He occupied a small but away by itself in the upper grounds.

Teachers from Ballarat took physics, chemistry, and geology lectures and practical classes. Specialist officers of the State Forests Department came to lecture in forest law and fire protection.

Office Staff

A typist assisted the Principal with School administration.

Domestic Staff

There was a resident housekeeper (she preferred "matron") and from one or two resident housemaid-waitresses who came from farms out Newlyn way. Their quarters were upstairs above the main entrance. The only time a student could go upstairs was to raise or lower the flag on special occasions, or to carry something heavy at the request of the housekeeper.

The laundress, cook and those housemaid-waitresses who lived locally came in daily.

Groundsman

The solitary groundsman lived on a small farm at North Creswick, where he and his wife milked cows. He collected the kitchen scraps for their pigs, swept drains, raked gravel paths, scythed grass alongside the main paths in the grounds in season, fetched firewood for the Principal's house, and attended to odd jobs. He had no workshop skills, and was not literate, but could sign his name for....

his pay. We took little notice of him most of the time, except when benching firewood from the five-foot lengths from the forest. He did not need to know how to operate and maintain a motor mower or chainsaw because they were not yet on the scene.

School Rules

There were rules, printed on stiff cardboard the size of a small poster but not generally displayed, dating from the earliest days of the School. Two bear mention.

Absence

Students could go down the street out of class hours, fieldwork and study hours for a milkshake or suchlike, and to the movies in the Town Hail on Saturday (funds permitting), but otherwise we had to put in a note of absence to the office. There was no evening or week-end bus service to Ballarat. Some of the ex-servicemen went to one or other of the three hotels in Creswick from time to time.

We were convinced that the Principal got reports from townsfolk about the comings and goings of students, and he dropped hints from time to time that he had numerous informants. He managed to keep a tight rein on most of his charges, exercising gentle bluff. On one occasion several students had sneaked off to a dance, and a couple of days later the Principal called for all those who had been absent to report to his office. He made a show of counting those who fronted up, said "Get the others" and waited. Sure enough they were fetched.

Church Attendance

The School rules required attendance on at least one church service on Sunday, but this was not enforced.

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Several students played in one or other of the tennis teams organised by the Victoria Street Methodist church, but only a couple of them attended services there. Out of the blue, the minister decided that every member of their teams had to attend a Methodist service at least once a month, or else leave the popular club. Several of us decided to leave, and were welcomed at the Creswick town club, and played with it for the rest of our student days. We were certain the Principal knew about the defection and suspected he thought church attendance was a trivial matter.

Daily Timetable

The timetable set out lectures, practical classes, and fieldwork times.

Weekday breakfast was at eight, dinner at 12.30 p.m., tea at 5.30 p.m.

Lectures commenced at 9.00 a.m., and there was a morning break of 10 minutes.

Fieldwork commenced at 1.30 p.m., and finished at 5.00 p.m. on four afternoons of the week, and on

Saturday it began at 8.00 a.m., and ran until noon.

Quiet study was compulsory from 7.00 p.m. to 9.00 p.m. five nights a week. The Principal or perhaps his deputy could appear at any time.

The bell under the verandah in the corner of the quadrangle which sounded these and intermediate times had come from the former Creswick Grammar School. Ringing the bell was a rostered duty for juniors.

There was sport on Wednesday afternoons. Times were changing. We were told that this was an innovation when the war ended in 1945, when the students had, they said, persuaded the Principal to introduce a sports afternoon. In 1946 there was a campaign in industry for a 40-hour week, and the Commonwealth Arbitration Commission declared itself in favour of the 40-hour week in October 1946. Wednesday afternoons were occupied with tennis, cross country running, swimming, cricket, football or golf according to the season. Sometimes there were sports afternoons with students from the Ballarat Teachers College. Every student had to be listed on the sports sheet for the afternoon. Sport, or an approved alternative where warranted, was an act of duty.

Meals

The 21 meals a week were adequate and wholesome, and ran to a weekly cycle. Was it corned beef and cabbage and baked apples because it was Thursday, or vice versa?

The School provided no extras in the way of food, but a spare apple or orange could be carried away from the evening meal. It was a long time between tea and breakfast. Supper groups from adjoining studies were formed in the winter term.

The furnace room at the end of the wooden dormitories, which housed the hot-water tank for the dormitories, allowed some space for drying wet clothes, but, more importantly, for heating up meat pies and pasties fetched from a shop in the main street by a junior on street duty. He went down the back track and over the creek to a small shop, with the orders and a pocket of money to perform this useful service. He arrayed the brown paper bags around the top of the furnace as soon as he got back. At break time, the owner of a pie or pastie could be confident his sustenance was untouched.

Sixpence would buy a ration of broken biscuits in a paper bag from Hawkey's grocery. Sweet and dry biscuits were delivered to grocers' shops in square tins with a hinged lid, and they would be weighed out to each customer's order. Inevitably some biscuits in the tins were broken and were sold cheaply. The buyer of broken biscuits got a mixture of whatever sorts came to hand.

Domestic Chores

Laundry

The School had a wash-house equipped with a copper and cement troughs. There was no washing machine nor drying cabinet. There was no hot water tap: water was heated up in a copper in the corner. Juniors did the washing and any required ironing as a fieldwork duty. Each student could put in clothes for washing according to a standard weekly list.

On Monday afternoons two or three students were rostered for laundry. Batches of clothes sorted by type were well and truly boiled up, rinsed and wrung out, and then carried to long lines on the rise east of the dormitories to be pegged out. Weather permitting, the dried items were brought in for folding and sorting on Tuesday afternoon. The system depended on legible naming of the clothes, of course. If the weather was wet, laundry duties were extended to later in the week.

In 1947, or perhaps late in 1946, laundry fieldwork finished when the School engaged a part-time laundress who was assisted by one or more of the housemaid-waitresses.

Cleaning

The bathrooms and lavatories were cleaned by juniors on roster. This was a daily task after breakfast. The labs (botany, wood technology, chemistry, and physics) were swept out and benches polished according to a weekly roster, and given a thorough cleaning when necessary, as a fieldwork duty.

Tremeame House was mopped and swept out on Saturday morning by two junior students. This task took all the allotted time, and the standard of cleaning was often checked by a senior. Dust on the high skirting boards or behind a door? Door mats shaken out?

The botany lab in the extended billiard room, had to be spick and span, and glassware washed and dried. The front windows of Tremeame House had their original venetian blinds. The painted wooden slats required wiping free of dust regularly.

Domestic staff swept and dusted the classrooms and the library. The students swept and mopped out their dormitories and, of course, made their own beds.

Fetching and posting mail was a rostered duty for first year students. There were eleven inward mails a week, the first being sorted before 8.30 am on six mornings, and an afternoon mail on weekdays becoming available late in the afternoon.

Going for the morning mail was truly a mail-run for the duty man as soon as he managed to get breakfast down. Those students hoping for a letter would be waiting in the library by 8.45. The Post Office did not open until nine, but we were welcome inside the side door under the verandah to grab the morning's haul. A letter posted in a Melbourne suburb before 8.00 p.m. arrived the next morning.

Collecting afternoon mail was a little hit and miss. The truck coming in from the forest might stop at the Post Office, or a student might nip down at afternoon break.

The students on Tremearne duty went to the Post Office on Saturday morning, just before break time.

The juniors had to provide specimen signatures on a foolscap sheet, to allow any of them to collect registered letters or packets from the Post Office. The postmaster destroyed the list when a list for the new year was handed to him, as discovered by a third year student who went to the Post Office just before it closed one Saturday for a registered packet he sorely needed. Yes, it had arrived, but his were expostulations were useless, even though it was his packet; he was not on the list and therefore the postmaster would not hand over the packet. The senior's chagrin when no junior could be produced before the office closed for the weekend was heart-rending. Tobacco was always scarce and his mother had made a special effort to post him ready-rubbed cigarette tobacco in time for the weekend. There was general indignation over the postmaster's pigheadedness. Future lists of juniors' signatures had a heading pointing out that they were agents in the absence of the addressee, not the only authorised persons.

Transport

A few of the students had brought a bicycle to the School, but these were not used very much, except to ride to the Creswick Golf Club out on the Ballarat road.

No one had a car or motor cycle until two of the ex-servicemen acquired bikes. One was an "Indian" with sidecar and the other a "Douglas" which boasted horizontally opposed twin cylinders. Their owners, chronically short of petrol, being rationed, tried a shandy with eucalyptus oil (from the samples stored in the oil lab in Tremearne House), with patchy results.

For geology excursions, a lift-off rigid wooden canopy to provide a sheltered ride was yet to be made in the School workshop. In 1946 there were a couple of chilly and wet occasions, notably the trip to the Lal Lal falls area, when it snowed and students huddled under a loose tarpaulin on the tray truck.

When made, the canopy was not used for fieldwork, because the truck went on to other work after dropping off students here and there in the School forest. The passengers stood behind the cabin, sat on the tray among the tools for the day, or perched on the tailboard or sides. Three years passed without a truck accident, although one morning the rear of the truck bumped a bit hard over a narrow rut and a student perched on the tailboard did a back somersault, landing on his feet behind the slowly departing truck.

For Saturday football, players and supporters travelled in one of the buses which took workers to and from Ballarat on weekdays. The tennis players enjoyed a ride to Kingston, Smeaton, Lawrence and other clubs in the Mt Prospect Tennis Association in cars owned by members of their club. The forestry lecturer had a car with a dickie seat into which three students in the town team could squeeze when necessary for a ride.

Excursions

Owing to the neighbouring forest and plantations, and the School arboretum, there was no necessity for introductory botany excursions, but I wonder now why we did not have a few class botany walks in the adjacent forest, which would have been very useful for students getting to grips with botany for the first time. Our teacher brought plenty of fresh material into classes. If keen enough we could bring home specimens from forests we worked in during summer vacations. Timber harvesting and sawmilling excursions were few, being restricted to sawmills in and near Ballarat.

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Third year students spent a week in September at the Division of Forest Products, CSIRO, at South Melbourne. The program of lectures and demonstrations in all aspects of wood technology and utilisation was superb, and the stature of the staff was recognised internationally.

Third year students took it in turn to spend a day on patrol in the Glen Park and Cabbage Tree forests with the Forest Guard, selectively marking trees for timber cutters, measuring up cut timbers, and keeping an eye out for any unlicensed or unexpected activities. This day called for a cut lunch and some nerve, because the Guard was mounted and the student had to take one of the School horses. There were two, Triton, a retired racehorse, scarcely suited for patrolling in forest, and Darkie, a cunning old nag which sometimes tried to rub its rider's leg against a tree. A day with Peter Tueno was interesting and, if inclined, he could impart a lot of useful information. Two days out with him was probably one's quota for the year.

Fieldwork

During the war, fieldwork had included making pine charcoal for munitions in kilns at the School, distilling eucalyptus oils, and trial tapping the resin from radiata and Corsican pines for evaluation for industrial uses.

The steel charcoal kilns stood ready for use, but were idle in 1946 and thereafter. The equipment included a charcoal crusher driven from a huge one-cylinder engine. The eucalyptus oil still was demonstrated once during my time as a student.

First year students did fieldwork on Monday, Tuesday, Friday and Saturday. On Thursday afternoon they had chemistry practical work.

Fieldwork tasks that come to mind were cutting firewood, maintaining roads in the School plantations and native forest, developing walking tracks in the relatively new Koala Park, pruning pine trees, doing practice chain and survey traverses, level surveys, workshop duties (repairing furniture and making new items required at the School), general work with the plant propagators at the State Nursery a few minutes' walk from the School, and blacksmithing. A visiting farrier used the School forge. The blacksmithing comes readily to mind because I was the usual striker in my second year, for I could hit straight and cleanly and had stamina. I enjoyed using the 10-pound and a larger hammer for heavy work. Tempering hot metal in water or oil to blue or bronze was hit and miss. From iron rod we made and threaded long bolts for wooden bridges, but the washers and nuts were bought in. When poles were erected for radio aerials, we made the bolted collars to hold the guy cables. The collars, climbing pegs and bolts for a 50-foot pole with cross-arms rigged as a hose-drying hoist for canvas fire hoses were made in the forge. The several pulleys were bought in, of course. There were portable forges in two Gippsland districts where I worked, but I never saw them in use.

The road maintenance work was mainly digging out silt and forest debris from table drains and culverts, installing new culverts, gravelling, and clearing any fallen trees from the road. The gravel was tossed with shovels on to the 30-hundredweight Chevrolet wooden-framed truck, from one of two pits near Creswick Creek.

Indoor fieldwork included maintenance of the herbarium, listing new items into the library, mounting insect specimens, draughting maps and plans from field measurements and observations, making up standard solutions for chemistry classes, and, on Saturday mornings in the winter, writing out licences for callers who wished to obtain firewood and other produce from the School hardwood forest. Making and painting, and repainting genus, species, botanical family and common name on boards for the arboretum was a big task. Some were nailed to tree trunks but many were pegged into the ground. The latter needed frequent

maintenance because of frost and rain-splash, bacteria and sooty mould. When one of us read that two label painters were kept fully occupied year in year out at the Botanic Gardens in Melbourne, we thought we were in good company.

The School Dam

An interesting lesson came from an unsuccessful project: construction of a dam to provide extra water for the School. In preparation, the students re-dug long stretches of water races established by the goldminers. The gradient of the race was carefully maintained using boning rods and checks with the surveyor's level from time to time. Tree roots had often invaded the old race, requiring some heavy work with hand tools. An earth wall was built up by a bulldozer across an eroded gully in a scraggly pine plantation high above the School. A sheepsfoot roller was towed back and forth by the dozer to ram successive layers of earth forming the wall. The lecturer reckoned the eroded faces of the gully were too steep for the earth to repose on them securely, and said they should be battered back to a much shallower angle. He was overridden. The rains came and water flowed along the races most satisfactorily. The water in the dam rose several feet until one afternoon in 1947 the dam broke. Dangerously, and it turned out, unsuccessfully, students burrowed into the wall and tried for many days to pug up the lines of failure with plastic clay, ramming it into place with their boots as they lay on their back. The wall continued to leak. The dam was abandoned.

We had laid a new 3-inch galvanised pipe all the way from the dam to the School. And this was to lie under the ground, all but forgotten, until uses were found for it about 20 years later.

Axes

An axe and a round carborundum stone were issued to each student. At the end of the year all axes were handed in, for re-issue the following February, Gapped or badly worn axes were discarded or relegated to a common pool for use as splitting axes. At the beginning of the new School year students selected their axe in descending order of seniority. Being third from the bottom, in my first year I had the choice from about five axes which no one else fancied. The first decision was whether to take a Kelly or a Plumb, then to examine the blade, with little appreciation of the finer points of shape of the face and shoulder. Both brands were American. The steel in the Kelly was tempered harder, keeping an edge well but was prone to gapping by a knot or other hard wood. The head of a Plumb was softer steel which lost its edge rather quickly in eucalypt but seldom gapped. In 1947 the new axes on issue were Hytest, made in Australia. Some of the steel in them was very brittle and the spotted gum handles had a rougher finish than American hickory.

Before starting work on Saturdays in winter it was prudent to warm the axe head by a small fire, to reduce the chances of gapping the edge of the cold steel.

For convenience, we kept our axe in our dormitory. We did not have leather pouches for the head, and made wooden shields to cover the blade, usually kept in place by a stretched loop of bicycle tube.

Practice with the axe over three years at Creswick and on vacation work brought a good understanding of the tool, equipping us to cut scarfs and back-cuts, to split billets, cut bush survey pegs, fashion benchmarks at the base of trees for level surveys and to cut surveyors' shields in the trunks of trees. We pruned radiata pine frees in unthinned stands to a height of about seven feet with a very sharp axe, using upward blows memorably close to the bark of the trunk. [Some 20 years later I examined wood that had formed after pruning, The accurate, single-blow severance of the green limb had produced a laudable result, closer than shears, cleaner than most saws.]

Saws

The hand saws used for fieldwork were peg and raker or M-tooth crosscut saws, and bow saws for cutting pine. Crosscut saws were taken out only when it was certain that two or more larger trees would have to be felled that day. The firewood gang was driven out on the truck but had to walk home carrying the gear for two kilometres or more. Carrying a crosscut saw in addition to one's felling axe and perhaps a splitting axe or steel splitting wedges and a sledge hammer was to be avoided.

Gang Leader

When the day's fieldwork sheet was drawn up by the Senior Student the first-named student (from second or third year) in each gang was the boss for the afternoon or Saturday morning. He was responsible for it being ready on time properly equipped, for its output on the day, for personal safety, for making decisions during the work, and for returning clean of tools. For some continuing jobs the one student often remained boss until it was completed.

Older students in the gang always respected decisions of the student being given his turn as boss. This aspect of fieldwork was helpful later on to a young field forester dealing with much older men - overseers, foremen, and the members of forest work gangs. [These days gangs are called teams and crews, perhaps because the connotations of "gang" are deplored. Fifty years ago, membership of a well-led, competent gang was a matter of satisfaction.] One was in charge because the organisation had, in a sense, written your name at the top of the list, and you were expected to take responsibility and to let no one down.

Skills

Fieldwork was a mixture of work necessary to run the School and of practical exercises supporting classroom instruction. It provided plenty of exercise, lessons in teamwork and in improvisation.

Manual skills with axes, mattocks and picks, shovels, firefighting tools, and saws were supplemented by experience with ropes and pulleys, hand winches, and with what made an effective road drain.

Creswick foresters became supervisors who got their boots and hands dirty, and were expected to display some proficiency to the men being supervised. Half-days of effort with only one short break brought an understanding of sustained physical effort as part of a team. We became aware of reasonable rates of performance and output doing various tasks. We were expected to learn something useful about the capacity of manual workers.

Firewood

The brochure for the School boasted that "Creswick enjoys a brisk and invigorating climate". The two lecturers' houses had electric hot water; otherwise the School depended on firewood for cooking, hot water and warmth. The science labs had small bottles of gas for Bunsen burners. Spirit lamps and electric hotplates were used in the botany lab and small electric hotplates in the wood technology lab. A plentiful supply of dry firewood, in stove and fireplace lengths, was a prime need.

The School community burned a lot of wood in a year. The kitchen, wash house, furnace, fireplaces in the library, classrooms and labs, domestic quarters and the three houses consumed up to 250 measured tons a year. One ton was reckoned to be 50 cubic feet of wood, bark and air. Stacks of green wood were five feet wide (billet length, that is, two axe lengths) by 2.75 feet high by 10 feet long. This provided a half-ton

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stack when the wood had settled and dried. From the time a green billet lay in the forest until wood was placed in a fire box or fireplace it could have been handled twelve or more times.

Cutting, carting, benching and distributing firewood was a major fieldwork task. Green wood, mainly peppermint and messmate, was cut in the School forest by axe (or occasionally a crosscut saw), split by axe and wedges if necessary, then stacked and measured. The next year it was carted on one or two trucks sent from the Commission's fleet and put into large stacks at the School after the final examinations in November, when we did fieldwork morning and afternoon.

As needed, the billets were sawn into one- and two-foot lengths or into 28-inch lengths for the furnace. The groundsman operated the sawbench, assisted by up to four students bringing billets to it and tossing and stacking the benched firewood.

Students further split the benched wood and distributed it by wheelbarrow to two of the houses, and the other buildings. Wood for the fireplaces in Tremearne House and the wood technology lab was ferried on the truck to the wood store in the outbuilding. The groundsman usually dealt with wood for the Principal's house.

The senior lecturer and his wife expected firewood and kindling split just so, and stacked neatly under the water tank at their cottage, and for every bit of loose bark to be swept up and taken away. On one occasion, early in 1946, the lecturer ticked off one of the first-year students as he was delivering wood, for roughly split wood, calling him "boy". This ex-servicemen reacted by flying into him, pointing out he had been a naval officer and would not be treated that way, saying he would never bring wood to the house again. Nor did he. The schoolboy-juniors marvelled when they heard about that, knowing they could never dare imitate him.

The two open fireplaces in the botany lab, and the large fireplace at the end of the long main classroom would burn lots of wood but scarcely warm the rooms in really cold weather, even when fires had been kindled some time before classes began. The two fires in the library burned for long hours in the depths of winter, making the library and reading room attractive gathering places.

Vacation Work

First and second year students were required to undertake summer vacation work for the Commission for three or four weeks wherever they might be posted. We were paid at the rate applicable for age as Lad Labourer under the Australian Workers' Union determination, and were issued with rail travel vouchers to our destinations.

In January 1947 most of our group, together with three or four of the year ahead of us, were in a camp on Gunbower Island where the Commission wanted to put the network of dirt roads and tracks on the map by means of chain and compass traverses, tied in with simultaneous level surveys to be done by students of engineering at The University with our assistance as staff-men and benchmark cutters. We slept in tents lined up near an existing mess but and ablutions shed, in a pleasant spot on the Gunbower Creek. Lighting was the hurricane lantern. It was our first experience of a forest camp, where we learnt that the Commission provided the cook and the members of the mess paid for the foodstuffs only.

The cook relied on firewood, of course, and it was a tricky job splitting enough usable wood from the old box and red gum blocks on the camp heap. The easy ones had been split long since.

The VSF - 1946 to 1948 Alan Eddy

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Galvanised bucket showers were filled with water from the Gunbower Creek heated in a free-standing copper and hung in a hook overhead. A pair of buckets provided a luxurious shower after the day's work.

The engineering students soon found that heat waves from the ground prevented them from reading the levelling staff through the telescope of the Dumpy or Quickset levels, usually after one or two o'clock. It was not a matter of shading the instrument (as illustrated in one of the surveying texts); the shimmer in the hot air defeated accuracy. We altered working hours to overcome the worst of it. Breakfast was over a little before five, and work in the forest finished around two o'clock. If we were near the River we could swim while waiting for pick-up by the utility truck stationed at the camp, driven by one of the more senior students.

The new hours were also welcomed by the compass-men, axemen and others in the traversing gangs, because the reflected heat from bare ground became fierce during the afternoon.

In January 1948 we were posted in pairs to work under the eye of a District Forester. Joe Morley and I went to the No 1 Camp in the Mt Disappointment forest, in the Broadford Forest District. This camp had been one of four built to accommodate aliens interned during the war who were set to work cutting firewood for the Melbourne market. The camp had a diesel electricity generator, plenty of hot water, was connected by Forests Commission telephone to other camps and beyond, and had a good water supply.

A construction gang building a major road from the main ridge down to the King Parrot Creek, on the Flowerdale side of the forest, was housed at the camp. There were truck drivers, powder monkeys, bulldozer and grader operators, jackhammer men and labourers, enough to justify a clerk-storeman in the unpainted wooden office at the camp. Construction was well advanced, and had almost reached the Creek and the Shire road beyond by the time we surveyors caught up.

We had a Stanley but each, measuring eight by 12 feet, furnished with a "Cyclone" bed, and palliase, and grey blankets. There was a "Backwoodsman" stove, and in my but a bush chair left behind by some previous occupant provided unexpected comfort.

Our task was to traverse the new road by chain and compass, tying in our survey to any old cadastral pegs, fence corners and creek crossings where they were shown on the plans available and within reasonable distance of our road. The first day we started at the camp, subsequently a truck would drop us off and we hitched a ride home at the end of the day (usually by prior arrangement with one of the truck drivers).

After a few days, the District Forester (in later years a Commissioner of Forests) called in to camp after tea, and after a few questions, asked to see the progress of the plot of our traverse. Alas, we hadn't even started - we never realised that the custom was to plot up the day's work every evening when it was fresh in the mind, allowing it to be checked against any existing plans, and to avoid lengthy stints of office work later on. Our explanation that we thought we'd wait for a wet day for office work did not impress our mentor, who wondered how many wet days there were in January north of the Divide. We managed to catch up with the plotting and all was well next time he called in. The survey tied in quite well with the few tie-in points near the road, so all was well.

One lunchtime the two of us were sitting by the batter of the road enjoying pannikins of tea from our small billy after polishing off our sandwiches when one of the powder monkeys, Joe, from Italy who spoke but a few words of English, ran into sight round the curve waving his arms and shouting. We could not make out what he was trying to get over to us, even as he continued running past us as fast as he could go. Amusement was wiped from our faces by detonations, falling small rock fragments, and a cloud of dust

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swirling around the corner. Joe and others were blasting rock to widen the road formation where a culvert was required, and had stopped for their lunch before firing the charges they had laid. Had we come along late in the morning we would have heard the engine and chatter of the air compressor while they were drilling holes in the rock. When I turned my attention back to my tea there was a light film of dust on it. [In those times there was no warning notice or patrolman with a red flag to warn any driver of blasting. Handling explosives and detonators in the field could be cavalier. Transport by rail and truck to the District magazine was done according to regulations, but from there on there are tales to be told.]

For the long weekend of Australia Day, everybody left the camp, except we two students, who had the job of manning the telephone, guarding the camp, topping up canvas water bags in case fire crews needed them, and generally making ourselves a bit useful. We felt our responsibility, but the week end turned out very quiet. On the Saturday evening we spotted the orange glow of a large forest fire, at some distance from the camp, increasing in size as minutes ticked by. We were on the point of raising a general alarm by telephone, when the top of the moon appeared behind the trees.

In second term vacations there was work for a few students who wanted it, notably manning the Forest Commission's pavilion at the Royal Melbourne Show for day and evening shifts. It was interesting talking to the many people who passed through the display, which promoted fire prevention, tree planting and use of Victorian timbers. There were tables and other items of furniture supplied by local makers, stacks of honey in glass jars, and a glass-fronted working beehive. The bees came and went through vents to the outside. The staff on duty answered questions, handed out pamphlets, and generally felt they were spreading the message of forest conservation.

Teaching

Chemistry and physics were familiar subjects, and the work was extended at a reasonable pace from what we had covered at school. Doing the practical work and writing it up took a good deal of time. Botany was new to nearly everyone in the first year class. The lecturer dictated rather than expound a topic, with the aim that all should end up with "a good set of notes". He was timed on several occasions at 45 words a minute, and taking notes was a trial earlier on owing to his so-called Scots diction and the unfamiliar vocabulary. Incomplete notes were often compared in the evening so that gaps and misspellings could be fixed up, sometimes with hilarity.

Geology was taken by a teacher from the Ballarat School of Mines, who could be easily distracted into explaining the finer points of lawn bowling when crystallography became dreary. We were introduced into another new realm, of rocks, minerals, and geological processes important to land managers. The crystallography seemed remote from forestry, and it was there, we reckoned, because the syllabus was very close to the first year university subject.

In second and third years we had few formal lectures in some subjects, such as organic chemistry, wood technology, and forest entomology. There was a lot of peer group learning one way and another. No doubt our progress was followed closer than we realised then or can recall now.

Library

The library had the text books of the day, the main ones in multiple copies, and a grand accumulation of book stock from the School's first days. The Commission subscribed to journals and magazines from Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, South Africa and India.

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Reports and pamphlets from various research organisations were important sources of information. Bulletins and pamphlets from the Division of Forest Products, CSIR (later CSIRO) were essential reading for wood technology, timber seasoning and timber preservation.

The library never closed. Borrowings were made on an honour system. If one needed a borrowed item urgently it was simply a matter of looking in the card drawer and going to the student who had entered his name on the card. Items in current demand by a class were passed from student to student in the studies. These arrangements were notably harmonious. We had no librarian, and relied on rostered students to enter up new stock, to check the cards for long overdue borrowings, and to keep the library shipshape. [It was not until 1974 that part-time professional assistance was brought in to catalogue the book stock and major other items. That librarian finished his work in 1976, and fortunately soon after a specialist librarian happened to move to North Creswick with her husband and she consented to run the library. Her valued services included tailor-made courses to teach students to use a library well.]

Creswick

Townfolk

The citizens of Creswick had been accustomed to forestry students for 35 years. Students provided players for tennis and football teams, and some were occasional or steady companions for daughters in the town and district. The townfolk tolerated students as poor, ever-hungry and cheerful pedestrians.

Students learned through observation and anecdote about the milieu and interactions of a small town, perhaps comparable to places they would work in and near. The weekly "Advertiser" printed in Creswick contributed to this understanding, reporting Shire meetings and the activities of all and sundry organisations in the district.

The Principal offered to help us avoid unwanted social invitations by saying we could not get permission from him to be out for the occasion. He cautioned students often that they were not there to find a life partner, and to take a long term view of their prospects. Some Creswick mothers and their daughters no doubt regarded the School as a prime source of a husband, but on that I shall not comment further.

Creswick was a friendly and encouraging setting to spend three formative years.

Medical Services

There were two doctors, in separate practices. A dentist visited Creswick regularly, using a room next to the pharmacy, which was run by a doddering old man. The dentist was said to use a pedal drill, and students attended their established dentist at home when a vacation came around rather than go to a stranger.

One doctor had been in Creswick since the 1920s, the other was a much younger man. The students were a healthy lot so the relative merits of the doctors meant little to us.

The hospital admitted few students as patients. A broken leg at football comes to mind, but that's all.

Amusements

At the School

Students had made a tennis court below the main building in the early 1930s, using hand-mixed concrete. The surface remained good, played fast and the ball bounced lower than on the black Colas and sawdust

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or asphalt courts in the town. Tennis balls wore quickly on the concrete. The court got a lot of use, from well before breakfast in fine, dry weather.

Students played card games such as solo, poker or pontoon, and table tennis, darts or hookey at the School. Saturday night could be a pleasant time to catch up with reading or writing an essay. Footballers were sometimes ready for an early night after a tough game preceded by four hours' fieldwork.

Cinema

It is stretching it to call the Town Hall where movies were shown on Saturday nights a cinema. A projection box had been built in and a chap from North Creswick (a son of the groundsman) had a certificate allowing him to operate the equipment. The hail was cold, the folding seats uncomfortable, but screenings were well-attended. Those students friendly with girls of the town would often arrange to "meet inside", to avoid embarrassment about not paying for the girl's ticket. Into the bargain, she could be relied on to bring a rug to keep them warm.

By no means did the majority of students go to the pictures every Saturday. Shortage of funds was sometimes a problem.

Local Events

For those who liked dancing there were occasional local dances.

Attendance at social events, such as the Presbyterian Fellowship Association, meeting monthly on a week-night at St Andrew's church, called for a list of students in the office beforehand. The suppers were excellent, the badminton and table tennis fun, some of the girls pretty, and the levy for attending was only two shillings.

Annual Dance

An annual dance was held in the main classroom after the final examinations, after much preparation. The old linoleum was carefully rolled up and marched away. "Palais Wax" was sprinkled on the wooden floor and students with their feet wrapped in cloth buffed the surface by skating around the floor. A pianist and two other musicians provided the music.

The dance was preceded by a dinner for students and staff at which the seniors had been formally farewelled.

For those students not interested in inviting a guest nor in dancing there was plenty to do in the kitchen, and in helping generally through the evening. The housekeeper turned the kitchen over to them for this one occasion so they could finish preparing the supper, which had been partly got ready by the kitchen staff. Supper was taken in the library.

Student nurses in Ballarat and students of the Teachers' College supplemented the list of local young women invited for this special occasion.

Assessment of Students

Term Tests

We had written exams in each subject at the end of first and second term, assessed by the lecturers, and finals in November which were set and marked by external examiners. The term tests were held for practice and to keep us working. Most students thought we were over-tested.

Term scripts were not always returned to students, helpful as that could be. One year, the Principal had not revealed marks for one subject until the second term was nearly over. His response to renewed enquiries, without producing scripts or a list of results, was "You all got 65%".

Annual Examinations

The lecturers did not see a final exam paper until we did. They were brought in under seal by the secretary to the Board and he opened the packet in the exam room just before he distributed them. In the 1940s at least, the exam room was supervised by the secretary except for any necessary brief absence. The lecturers were as keen to scan each question paper as were the candidates. At the end of the exam, usually after three hours, the secretary would collect up the scripts and immediately seal them securely in a bundle for transmission to the examiner.

The examiners of for botany, chemistry, physics, and geology were staff of The University, and we understood that their subsequent reports could be critical of the lecturer as well as any students who had not done very well. Standards had to be seen to be maintained.

A story was current that the senior lecturer happened to find out in conversation with the Professor of Botany a few hours before the exam that a topic he had not covered in detail in class was on the paper. So it was that he called the class together in the evening for an hour's "revision" which they found particularly useful the next morning.

[That external examiner regime had changed by the 1960s, when each lecturer was allowed to recommend a final paper to the examiner (but did not know the fate of the draft). Later still, lecturers assessed the students' scripts and the external examiner moderated the marking. I believe that this last change was brought on by the other pressures on university staff and research scientists in November/December, together with a growing confidence in the lecturers' marking].

Interviews by the Board

The Board had a continuing role in assessing students. Every December it met at Creswick for two days, to review the progress of every student, interviewing them individually. Other business of the Board included approval of any changes to the curriculum and syllabuses. Collectively, the Board exercised a shrewd insight into life at the School and the progression of students through their three years. The visitors looked forward to convivial evenings together as guests of the Principal, who told me in later years that more important decisions were made at the dinner table than in any formal meeting of the Board.

For one's annual interview by the Board in the 1940s we had to polish up our tan boots, wear leggings over jodhpurs (the only airing for the year), and a sports coat.

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We knew the night before the Board arrived our rank in class and hence the order of interview. The Principal had assembled all of us, and starting with the bottom junior, read from his summary of results, ascending to dux of School. Quite a wait for the top seniors.

Unless there was something amiss, the interview of juniors was short, but one could be cautioned about fieldwork performance or whatever, as might have been indicated in the Principal's written report on each individual.

Third year students might be told by the Chairman of the Commission as the interview ended where they had been posted.

Seniority in the Department

The rank order of the graduating year set the relative seniority within that batch of base grade foresters, and certainly could influence promotions for years to come.

An officer's personal record held by the Forests Commission began with the papers which opened his dossier as a trainee. When it suited a Commissioner or senior officer to use a man's position out of the School, it was used as ammunition in hearing an appeal against non-recommendation for an advertised position. The annual lists of diplomates of the School since its inception were appended to a book by a former Chairman published in 1991. They are not alphabetical but in the order decided by examinations and interview at the end of third year at the School. The author of the book topped his final year in 1933; this no doubt influenced his choice of listing.

[The lists in the book do not indicate the exact outcome of the Board's final interviews with students, because in future years there were instances when a third-year student's aggregate examination score was just below the next above by very few marks, and the Board decided to rank them equal, on account of a better fieldwork and personal report by the Principal of the School. The Board enjoyed recalling a student after a few minutes deliberation following his interview to break the news that all-round performance did count.]

Leaving

Shortly after the Board had finished its interviews and any other business there was an assembly at which prize-winners were announced, commendations made, and departing students wished well. This occasion was attended by prize-donors and a few local guests. Parents were not invited.

All the students cleared off that afternoon; by trains from Ballarat, by bus into central Victoria, or, a few, in parents' cars. The School truck was available to ferry students to the railway station in Ballarat.

Junior foresters expected to travel light, from one forest assessment camp to another, or from district to district on frequent transfer. Many collections of insects, eucalyptus buds and fruits, softwood cones and geology specimens were passed on to remaining students or simply thrown away. A selection of notes and papers were kept for reference.

The jubilation of the occasion over-rode any wrench in leaving a School which had provided three happy years. There was no sense of lone dispersion. Victoria was a small State and we who left at the end of 1948 had been fellow students with 24 who had left at the end of 1946 or 1947, and there would be 27 more whom we had got to know leaving in the next two years. We already felt secure in a wider fraternity which understood our ideals and whence we came.