Chapter XVI

Extracts from former manuscripts and letters, written in England 1934 – 1962

A West Australian Agriculture Show in Miniature 1920 – 30

Because we live at least 11 months of the year in our dry, dusty, fly-pestered wheatbelt, we do not forego the pleasure of our own Show. It is talked about, advertised, planned and criticised weeks beforehand. When at last the great day arrives, we find ourselves in a conveniently flat paddock near our country town. This has been made into a minute replica of the Perth Show.

All the cars, trucks and carts are drawn up in good view of the ring, with seats in front for a closer view. Between these and the row of cars is a wide parade. It is called so because it is here that the ladies, in their new spring creations, parade. What would the Show be for the ladies without a new outfit? Worse than without beer for the men!

To the right of the ring are the committee tent, bar, the cattle, horses, sheep and pigs. On the immediate right is a canvas circle enclosing *the* side show for men, the boxing and the wrestling. Outside, on a truck, a man holds forth on the virtues of one Jock so-and-so on his right, ending with the bet of one pound that any fellow in the crowd will not knock him down. Some soft 'new chum' rises to the bait: in file most of the men nearby.

To the left of the ring are a few side-shows such as testing your strength (with a hammer), coconut shies, etc; and there are two large tents of exhibitions of all kinds: children's school work of every description, cakes, bread, lollies, needlework, vegetables, poultry and butter, samples of wheat, oats and chaff, etc. Under the table, behaving most beautifully, a hen in a bonnet and frock is sitting in a basket labelled 'Dressed Hen'! Next to these is the refreshment tent, where you can also buy hot water for the ladies' tea.

The children dodge in and out and round about all the time, some proudly showing off their exhibits, others eyeing the eatables. A couple of future budding farmers discuss with all seriousness the merits of two different kinds of wheat. An MP on a truck is making a speech on the greatness of the occasion, but it is doubtful if the ever-changing small crowd near him is listening.

There is the famous cameraman straight from Government Gardens walking round taking photos, developing and printing on the spot while you wait – sixpence a time. Each photo from the first posing to the final print is considered worthy of the best attention of all folk, young or old, near enough to enjoy the fun.

Throughout the warm afternoon, little tea parties are held on the trucks and around the cars.

In the ring, the ponies are the favourites and the children riding them are the best entertainment; from the large girl on a wee Shetland pony to the thin scrap of an eight-year-old on a lean, lanky-looking animal that was never born a pony. Then there is the jolly little farmer, in charge of the ring events, riding on a once-white tubby little hack, his feet nearly touching the ground and his wide expanse of shirt cloaking the horse's neck, looking exactly like the 'abbot on an ambling pad'.

As suddenly as the darkness comes, everyone disappears, the men (as though not a minute is to be lost) start up the engines and all the children and dogs leap on board. The women wedge into the fast-protesting 'littlies' and the paddock is left cold and empty, save for a few tents and poles. In an hour or two, all meet again at the Show Ball held in the Hall. The men have washed and fed and put on a tie (and had several beers to prepare themselves for the evening). The small children are asleep in the cars and the others washed and ready for any fun. The women have raided the hotel to fill the bedrooms and bathroom to change into their evening gowns and, in a short while, they sail out to the Ball, not a wave out of place, not a shiny nose among them. It is hard to imagine that, early in the morning, they were baking and preparing meals and doing many farm jobs.

So to the Ball and the prize-giving: the Show is a thing of the past for another year.

Sunday in the wheatbelt in Western Australia. Written in England in 1934.

Few of us realize that there are more churches to the population in Australia than in any other country in the world. This seems hard to reconcile with the stories we hear of people in the bush who have never been inside a church.

Let us take a typical Church Sunday in the wheatbelt district. There are 12 Church Sundays in the year – other Sundays are similar except that, instead of church, you may visit neighbours and they you. Every other Sunday there will be football or cricket at the siding. Imagine, so large is the parson's parish (or whatever he calls it) that he can only get around to everyone once a month and he strives to visit all the farms to remind the people that next Sunday is Church Sunday.

To my knowledge of our neighbours, there were at least those who attended the same service – Church of England, Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregational, Lutherans, a Christian Scientist and even a Seventh Day Adventist, so Church Sunday would see the men in white open-necked shirts and flannels, perhaps a sports coat and generally tennis shoes – ties are only worn for dancing and not always then: braces and waistcoats are unknown outside the city.

Picture, then Sunday morning, 7am, already there is the incessant buzzing of the flies and the heat is beginning to creep over everything. Presuming it is one of the red-letter days when the parson came the night before – we sat up late discussing many subjects – we now see him packing up his bed in his car. It seems like a little house, this old, second-hand saloon. He carries everything, from his dog collar for Sundays to his own boot polish. A little shaving water is all he needs for his toilet and, while he shaves, he chats merrily through the kitchen window to the farmer's wife (or 'Missus', as she is generally known).

The animals fed, cows milked and breakfast over, our visitor departs to stir up more people for church in the afternoon. Men working on the farm begin to shine themselves up, chiefly in honour of the one or two single girls they hope to see. The Missus hands out their precious white shirts she keeps clean for them. They may even get her to cut their hair. Then the weekly shave is endured with much groaning and gnashing of teeth. A light lunch, then probably the boss washes up while the Missus tends her fowls – she maybe sets bread and does other little jobs women will always find to do. The men will water and feed the animals and get the truck ready for its journey. When all are ready, they depart, quite sure in their minds that they will not be late for church – the parson will wait for them as they collect quite a load of people before they finally reach Caron, ten miles away.

Caron is really a railway station without a platform, but having three stationmasters, although even today [1978] I doubt if there are more than three trains a day – on a single-track line, too. [Frances added a note to say that now that trains are not watered and coaled there was *nothing* at Caron but the dam which supplied water to Latham. Everything had gone and it was just a siding like Bunjil used to be.] Each stationmaster, one for every eight hours, is married and has a house and children. There is a long barrack for all the single men, as the train changes staff as well as filling up with coal and water at this man-made oasis, nearly 250 miles north of the city. There are three other houses in Caron, the last two are used by the inhabitants and the farmers. The first contains the post office and the half-hearted store; the second is a school house and the remaining building is the Government school. It is very little larger than the usual size classroom for about 30 pupils with a small lobby attached to one end containing pegs, sink, and one precious water tap fed from a tank, which catches the water from the roof when it rains. The walls are all windows or blackboards. About 30 children learn their three Rs in here, all facing different ways, with nearly a dozen different classes under one teacher. Most of the year, the fireplace is covered by a rather ancient piano. Besides being a school, this room is used for parties, voting, dancing, and church. The Government charges a small fee for these uses, a service is two shillings and the parson leaves it on the piano for the teacher.

Approaching Caron in our truck, we hail the people on the tennis courts as we pass and, drawing up by the school, we join the folk on the verandah, mostly women and children, as some of the men are watching the cricket. The parson has gone for the key of the school: he returns, followed by the tennis players in their flannels, carrying their rackets, whom he has collected on his way. The women and children troop in and settle themselves on one side of the room, backwards in the school desks, leaving the front row for the late-comers. The men follow at the last moment and sheepishly take themselves to the other side of the room, each carefully dodging the seat nearest the collection plate – another trap for the late arrival. If the dogs behave and feel like church they may

slink in under a desk in the cool and lazily snap flies throughout the service. The babies sometimes like to give shows on their own, such as poking their little fingers into inkwells or extracting some lesson books from under the desks and spilling them in a quiet moment but, on the whole, they are wonderfully good.

The older children are always well amused, even if their minds wander from the service. The boys gaze at some man, dreaming of when they will be grown up, the girls notice the dresses and sometimes even gently lift the dress to see what kind of petticoat is underneath. In winter, if there has been a dance the night before, the blackboards are clean and the streamers hang across the room and they rustle in the breeze from the windows. In the summer, with both doors and all the windows open, there is hardly a breath of air, not even enough to stir the paper maps at the end of the room or shake the neat little rows of paintings on the mantelpiece. The men swat flies, the parson mops his brow, and the women fan themselves, regretting their corsets. In walks a white cat and, jumping up on the piano, trips up and down the keys, admiring herself in the polished front. She does not srike a note, but the children wait, hopefully. The accompanist needs to play 'amen' – she and pussy have silent struggle – the cat compromises by jumping on the top, beginning gently to wash herself.

If your mind still wanders from the service, you can do the sixth class sum all about a farmer and so many acres of oats or wheat, etc; the twice times table; read Morte d'Arthur (20 lines of it). Perhaps you would prefer the transcription class, all about a little girl called Red Riding Hood, or see the woodwork models, or notice whose turn it is this week to clean the blackboards and give out the books – you will find it all on the walls, and lots more.

The climax of the service is the collection – the unfortunate self-conscious male whose lot it is to take the plate offers it offhandedly to the nearest in each row; sometimes it is only by a miracle that it is not upset. Often, he forgets to put his own money in the plate and, blushingly, he walks up later to do so when the plate is reposing in front of the parson on his little table.

Church over, the children and men go out first, shaking hands with the parson at the door. The women linger a little – when they do reach the verandah, they stop to gossip a while. It is now the parson's turn to file past the women, talking with one and another, as he goes outside to join the men who have lingered to look at the schoolboys' gardens. Then, except for the tennis folk, they all ride or walk over to watch the cricket on the playing field – the parson's car full of women and children. In the cool of the swift twilight, they all speed home for an Australian tea and early bed in readiness for another week's work. The bush is a stranger to the Sunday silence of the town because it always has its silence but, neverthless, there is time to pause and feel the silence and say, with John Oxenham, 'For all the wonders of this wondrous world, the pure pearl splendour of the coming day, the breaking east, the rosy flush, the dawn, we thank Thee, Lord.'

Dawn on the wheatbelt in Western Australia, 1930

The dingoes have finished their concert on the sand plain and the moon sighs and sinks her sleepy head: now all is still and silent, so silent even the roos do not dare to hop, but doze until the dawn should come. The frosty nip in the air grows stronger, the rooster stretches himself in his coldness and crows, followed by the sounds of hoofs in the horse-yard. Silence and darkness and the slight, cheery light of the hurricane lamp as someone trudges over to 'feed up': a man's voice, half swearing, half caressing the animals; a cow moos, a flutter of wings from the fowl-house and a streak of light, thin and pale on the far horizon. Then noises of grooming and harnessing and the rattle of the milk tins; the cattle bell for breakfast rouses the rooster again; the now-widening streak of light shows the pale, ghostly sand plain in the distance and the quaint peaks of the anthills. The magpies begin their merry warbling and a tractor starts up in a far paddock, its busy chuff chuff echoing around the farmhouse.

The scrub fast assumes shape and the haystack is no longer a black blot. The dark pink smile of dawn is in the sky and the tall, thin, silvery gum trees and the work-bound team slowly clinking on its way complete the picture. As though in answer to the calves' hungry protest, the sun peeps over the sand plain and all the land is floodlit with the early morning glory of the morning

sun. Hundreds and hundreds of fairy dewdrops glisten as their twinkling toes dance on the countless cobwebs: there is a smell of green shoots damp with dew and you can feel, and almost hear, every blade of wheat growing in the earth – so is born the glory of the wheatbelt.

Old Birdie, an Australian character (written in England, 1937)
He was never anything but 'Old Birdie' to me. I suppose he had a Christian name, but, apart from stray parsons and bank inspectors, he was the only man in the district who was called 'Mr'. I had heard that Old Birdie was a queer old stick, living in a tumbledown shack by himself, was a Seventh Day Adventist and read a lot of literature. I imagined a bent old man with a withered beard, a birdie face with large spectacles over which he peered, a shiny bald head.Then I forgot about him until one day we chanced to be going near his shack which didn't look so tumbledown after all. Old Birdie came out to see who was passing, book in hand, with spectacles which he flicked off his ears with a characteristic jerk. I felt I knew why people called him Birdie. He straightened his long, thin back and, behold, he was a fine figure of a man with a clean-shaven face, browned and weather-beaten by how many more than 70 years no one seemed to know. Straggly iron-grey hair scattered thinly over his head but, as he shaded his eyes from the sun, he looked little more than 50 years of age.

Exactly when he began paying us visits, I cannot say. Weeks, years roll together when one is happy and busy, but at some time I began to realize that about every four weeks, Sunday would bring Old Birdie's step on the verandah. Always he was clutching, jealously, a small attaché case in one hand and probably an old stick in the other, not exactly used in walking but perhaps from force of habit from other days in his youth, when he felt happier with a stick for snakes. His rather sunken, parchment face would wrinkle into an odd kink of a smile and his slow voice would greet me. Holding his hat as only a bushman can hold it without making it a nonentity, he would bend his head and thin, long back and enter the coolness of the dining room. Somehow, he seemed to melt into a chair. A lemon drink swallowed and his spectacles deliberately placed on his nose and around his ears, he busily read one of my latest women's fashion magazines: thus he would stay until lunch while I did my jobs.

Sitting in front of an omelette and milk, instead of meat and tea, Birdie would roll forth in slow, deliberate tones the latest international news. To our amusement, he would always say 'Mr Ramsay Macdonald Prime Minister of England', all without a pause. How he came by his news was a mystery, but he was always well and correctly informed, whether it were an earthquake, drought, wars or rumours of wars or just something Mr Ramsay Macdonald Prime Minister of England had said. We liked best to draw him into reliving his boyhood and youth again, among the sugar-loaf mountains in the eastern states of Australia.

In his youth, it is probable that Old Birdie could barely read and write, but his knowledge of nature must have been vast indeed. He had acted as guide to many of the early botanists and naturalists, and told many thrilling and often amusing stories. He would tell of adventures on the slopes of the sugar-loaf mountains, of queer, short-lived gold rushes on the river beds, of quaint hops held in the village hall at New Year or Christmas and pranks the boys played together. It was hard to imagine Old Birdie ever young, playing pranks: it seemed he must always have been 40 to 50-ish, satanical and aloof, in spite of his gentleness.

All his stories were delightful, if you had the patience to wait for each word, each syllable to roll slowly from his lips – so slowly you could almost scream with impatience. In the evening, though, Old Birdie always managed to turn to his Bible. How lovingly he would take it from his little case and always Birdie managed to read a chapter, always one with plenty of 'begats'. How he gloried in the begats! His pronunciations especially were sometimes comical and my husband liked to be lulled into a doze by his soft sleepy voice, murmuring softly onwards, like waves rumbling softly on the gentle coast on a summer evening. So he would quietly doze to the droning, but never enough for Old Birdie to notice. I used to follow in my Bible, just to see what the words really were! In the winter, when his garden was full, Birdie always brought me gifts of vegetables (most acceptable in the bush). He hoped to convert me because I liked so many vegetarian dishes, but he was really too gentle to be a pest over the converting part.

After our home was burnt – months later, when we had settled into a strange, new, queer one – Sunday brought Birdie. He had a little puppy with him, which he had acquired a few weeks earlier. Pulling a piece of twine from his pocket, he tied the kangaroo pup to the verandah post and walked in. Evening came and my husband said I would not be able to follow with my Bible as it was burned. Birdie smiled his slow smile and, opening his little attaché case, took out a green box. 'I thought perhaps it was', he said, 'and so'. He handed me the green box. Inside was a black Bible, with fine leaves edged with blue-tinted gold. I felt choked for a few minutes. Birdie had only his pension and spent a good deal on his literature. Friends, relations and neighbours had been wonderfully good to us since the fire, but Birdie thought of the little Bible that I loved so much and he saved and waited. So we opened our Bibles and read the begats. Birdie was sure he would see the end of the world. By 1936 his body had grown tired of waiting. They found him in his hut, but his faithful friend, his dog, would not let them in so they had to shoot him.

Extracts from a letter published in the Western Mail *in Western Australia and written in Plymouth, England, 1936: 'Comparisons'*
The late English summer sun is a little more than axe-handle high and its gentle warmth is as caressing as the scent of a rose. The long shades of the beech trees spread patterns on the grass at my feet. In the wings of the trees the birds are chirping in gossip as they always do in the evenings. The tame robin on the lowest branch of the baby apple tree hesitates and gazes, his head on one side, at the bird-bath beneath. Occasionally, a car passes on the road nearby, but out of sight, or children's voices and their feet on the hard road clatter by. Now and again, as always in fair weather, a plane sails overhead: some of them are like silver swallows and I am never tired of watching them.

In the distant view a train has just rumbled over the bridge across the Tamar, the smoke curling in rolls of white cottonwool as it always does in England. A late bee bumbles hurriedly home, full of sweetness from the last of the flowers – and this is England at its best. But! England, flowers, trees, birds, hedges and old buildings are still just as lovely and as wonderful as ever, but the flowers soon fade and the leaves fall and in spite or because of cars, the country is not so easy to find unspoilt – the weather would worry you terribly. When the sun does shine, there is no more delightful spot on earth. The towns, the streets, the houses and shops seem drab and narrow after Perth. There are few cities as beautiful and bright and clean as Perth and the suburbs are a delight to the eye. The new houses here seem as drab and uncomfortable as the old ones. Clothes are not so bright, money worries are real and seem to fill so many lives, and unemployment is a real bogey.

Snobbishness has returned now, 18 years since the war. I hope I don't sound as though I am crying down the old country – far from it – but we forget everything changes when we leave it. England, as an older country, is well in front and you cannot compare it with a new country any more than you can compare a lily with a primrose. So, dear Pommies in the bush, do realize the bush is getting under your skin and, though you hope to visit the old country one day, do not expect that it will be just the same as years ago. Remember, you are changing too.

The sun will soon be kissing the earth. The wind has changed and, hearing a binder, I looked and found on a hill some distance off (in what we call 'our crop' because we often visit it) stooks are beginning to appear. The midges are chasing me inside: besides, I really need a woolly. The shadows have enveloped me in a cold, dark cloak, so goodnight to you, at least good morning. May your spring days be happy ones.

In England – Coronation Day, 1937
We walked in the evening on Plymouth's famous Hoe, crowds quietly moving around us. The water and the Sound were still and grey, so still and grey that the warships, in full dress, petrified on a grey mirror, were scarcely visible. Wee rowing boats, ant-like, trickled over the shiny surface leaving wriggly snail-trails behind them. For one moment, our eyes pierced the mists ahead and saw the pinpoint light of Eddystone. In that moment, the flags disappeared from the vessels and evening darkness seemed very near.

A thin, pale line of the moon was faintly veiled in greyness. Down and down from the Hoe we walked, always people standing, sitting or leaning, watching more people beneath, and the thick greyness of the sea coming nearer. Always bewildered spirits of other days seemed to accompany us, hundreds and hundreds of people walking and talking. The quietness of so many people seemed weird as though they, too, were spirits. The foreshore became a terrace of coloured fairy lights. We began to climb the Hoe again, each tier bringing us within sight of fresh, dainty lights. On the top, near the foot of the giant Smeaton Tower, we found ourselves among a huge host of people in unconsciously neat rows around the bandstand. Old favourite melodies were being played and, almost softly, the older folk sang half-forgotten songs.

Suddenly, five ghostly war vessels, shining like millions of gigantic diamonds, lay reflected in faint ripples of silver sea. Now a huge beacon was blazing, higher and higher, almost dwarfing the giant tower. I turned away from the glare and, in the glow, I saw hundreds of shining faces turned towards the fire. The band played the national anthem. As one, the men removed their hats; such a stillness came as though it might be two minutes' silence. Someone began to sing and soon the few hundred near us were singing loudly, their voices lost on the gentle breeze, to be echoed around the Sound. Then went up a great cheering for the King and searchlights showed a silver seagull sailing swiftly out to sea. As we swarmed to the new gate, with Drake's own vessel sailing merrily across the top, I faintly hear the echo of the Empire singing 'God Save the King'.

From my Christmas letter to WA, written in England in 1943
I have a little memory picture this year which I look at when I want to restore my faith in human nature as a whole. It was early in the summer. Plymouth shopping centre is just a heap, or rather many heaps of stone and rubble, the buses pass through to join up the rest of the city and right in the very centre are the shells of the Guildhall and parish church. It is a strange sight to see people waiting on the smooth, cleared pavements or sitting on the piles of rubble, waiting for buses.

Over what was the main doorway of the church, painted on wood, is the word 'RESURGAM' (I shall rise again). It stands out new and shiny and the walls are blacked with fire. You step through a doorway and you are in a garden, a *garden* inside the walls of the church. Little green lawns with paths of tombstones and, where the choir should be, rows of scarlet geraniums; over the remains of the altar a little wooden shelter has been built, like those wayside ones in Europe: there are flowers and a cross and again the word RESURGAM. Little birds flutter about among the ruined arches, stray oddments of glass in portions of drunken windows shine in the sun. To me, that church had been an ordinary affair in peacetime, but now – as a garden of memory, of faith,of beauty overcoming the hatefulness of war and bombed cities – it was a miracle. There is a notice that, weather permitting, there is a short service on Sunday evenings from 8 to 8.30.We went.

There were seats (a few had been placed on the lawns), a loudspeaker played records of such music as 'Hear my prayer', etc, a choir in full dress (little boys, young girls and elderly men), a celebrated organist sat at a small harmonium and a parson stood in bits of wood holding together more bits of wood which had been the rails of the pulpit. He was youngish, just old enough to have the ribbons of the last war: he was brown and smiling and fitted the garden he had been inspired to create. This church, which was a garden, was packed with people – young as well as old – standing in every corner possible and, it seemed, from every corner of the world and in all the uniforms it is possible to wear. Tall Americans, plump little Poles, lean Frenchmen and the Empire people – they were *all* there. So too were the stately and sometimes bewildered older people, lost a little in this maze of machine madness.

Balloons shone as they sailed in the blue evening sky overhead. The evening song of the birds minded not the choir nor the buses outside the walls: they flitted happily from wall to wall, never heeding the crowds below. All nature seemed to conspire to preach her own sermon for, as the Blessing was being said, a shaft of the setting sun caught the Cross. A little crack of glass above was caught, too, and hundreds of diamonds sparkled over the golden, fiery Cross like a crown. A huge silent seagull floated motionlessly through what had been the east window, down the whole length of the nave like a huge white dove of peace.

On attending the Carol Service at King's College Chapel, Cambridge, on Christmas Eve, 1948

We were in our seats at 10 minutes before 2pm for the service at 3pm. It was a miserable, wet afternoon and very dark; as it grew darker the candles were lit, hundreds of them, which took nearly an hour. Long before 3pm, we felt ourselves slipping back into history. Now and again, the wind beat feebly against the massive walls. I could spend hours describing the people who came in to fill up the seats – from every part of the world and every nation, colour and creed. I could see through the arch of the organ loft (or screen, as it is called) to the antechapel, which is the main part in the building. Six lighted candles, either side of the huge west door, seemed miles away in the dimness of stone and darkness of massed people. About ten minutes before time, the huge doors opened and the great sky hovered beyond the candlelight. The mayor's procession and the Provost of the College came in. We sat again and waited.

The organ music trembled to the lofty roof. We all stood again and, about three minutes to the hour, through the arch, I could faintly see the choir marching slowly around the antechapel. Then the faint, silver cross, edged by the whiteness of the choirboys, came nearer to the arch and stopped. The organ murmured away in to silence. A gale hit the branches of the huge copper beech tree near the west wall. Silence. Then St Mary's church clock chimed and struck three. Silence again. It seemed one must hear the beating of nearly 2000 hearts in such stillness.

We knew the whole world could now hear us – we felt that all the other centuries could also – then the seemingly bodyless, pure, clear boy's voice floated down from the roof – 'Once in Royal David's City'. By the time the choir had reached its climax of volume, everyone was in their seat and all the choir, the organ and ourselves were swelling with the sound. Listening on the radio, one hears the beauty of the voices singing, reading and praying. In that old building, which has known only goodness within its walls for 500 years, where youthful voices have striven, generation after generation, to equal the beauty of man's craft in stone, glass and wood; the truth-seeking minds who have sat all those years in these stalls; all seemed to make for such a holiness of peace that to breathe seemed unnecessary, so far were we lifted from our bodies. Time was not, and one might say the body was not. Perhaps the spirit had a brief chance to glimpse the eternity of spirit, the candle-light was not eerie but rather a little glow of heaven to remind one of that quaint hymn.

As the last carol boomed from the organ, the huge west doors floated open again. The night, the world, and maybe eternity were beyond. Slowly, the mayor and his train, the Provost, visiting clergy, the choir and the Dean, the Fellows and the graduates, marched slowly down the long aisle, out to the darkness beyond the doors; out to eternity as they had done these hundreds of years. Slowly, we all followed, so slowly; we reached the antechapel, its candles, like rushes round the walls, making pools of light amid the greyness of stone. At last we, too, went out into the Christmas sky and joined the legions in eternity.

The wheatbelt and Kalamunda – from the local paper, October 1969

In October, Mr and Mrs A G Spencer of Urch Road and Mrs F M Deacon of Canning Road went to the Bunjil, Latham and Maya district of the northern wheatbelt for the opening of the Taylor Memorial Church Hall, an interdenominational church built in memory of the pioneers of the district. Although nine clergy of various denominations were present, the building and the gifts inside were dedicated by the *people* themselves.

Mrs Spencer turned the key to open the church: she, with her Brother, Mr Frank Taylor, were the only people present who came to the district as children in 1909 when the first settlers arrived. Mr Spencer joined his father, one of the early settlers in Bunjil. His great-great-niece was the first child to be baptised in the church.

In 1929, Mrs Deacon (as a bride) went up to be the first farmer's wife west of Bunjil, taking with her a unique oak cross – a wedding present. Now, 40 years later, she returned with the cross and gave it to the church, a fitting memorial to her late husband, Edgar (Rusty) Deacon, one of the pioneers of the 1920s.

The Latham district has set an example to the country, to the whole world, in cooperation and tolerance.

Epilogue

In August 1934 the Depression was all around us. We could see no way of even being able to live decently and were getting more and more into debt, so we decided to return to *England*.There for 28 years we had many, many experiences of all kinds, even excluding the wartime ones. With a few exceptions, they are not in this book.

Although it is nearly 40 years since the last war, it seems too close to write about. Maybe when I am over 90 and don't feel like a trip somewhere, I'll write a small book on the fun we had with various amateur dramatic clubs we worked with during our 20 years in Cambridge. This was our great winter hobby, as well as preparing the plans for our summer tours.

As well as those, during any free daylight hours in the summer, we cycled around the countryside, enjoying nature, ancient buildings and Roman remains. We always spent a fortnight touring different parts of England: we had become amateur palaeontologists.

This is why, I suppose, we were such good companions. We had like interests, yet we were never in each other's pocket. We wandered around a building or site or exhibition on our own, now and again noting something to tell the other not to miss.

In 1962, a year after Rusty's mother (the last of his parents) had died and Rusty was due to retire, we returned to WA for a visit, and maybe to stay. On 1 January, 1963, we arrived in Kalamunda to stay with my mother, while we thought about touring Australia (which we never did). In Kalamunda, we found a dear little house of character in half an acre of beautiful garden, with wisteria arbours, vines, fruit trees and 32 roses of various kinds, and loads of flowers. We stayed, and called our home 'Waysmeet'. Within a few months, we had made as many friends as in all the years we were in Cambridge.

We gave many hours a week to the newly formed local Meals-on-Wheels. We had six years full of life and interest, but as we celebrated our fortieth (ruby) wedding day, it was obvious that suddenly it was the end of the road for Rusty. (Soldiers of the First World War seldom made old bones.) We sat silently together over a drink while waiting to go in for our celebration lunch. It was a silence for which there were no words to express. We just sat and gently smiled at each other.

Just over two months later, the coffin, covered with the Union Jack and 40 red roses, disappeared from my sight.

The next morning I debated whether I would lie in bed for a week and just cry and cry, or go into town and buy a new outfit and look at life again. I knew which Rusty would want me to do, so I plugged up my wound and started to live again.

On 8 January, 1979, the scar will have a bittersweet ache as it would have been our golden wedding day. I have made a new pattern of life and the 40 years are tucked away in their own little memory book.

If I have been fortunate in my life, it has been that most of my experiences and adventures have always been at the right time of my life; that, and the capacity to be able to turn disappointments and frustrations into advantages...

Sometimes, I feel that I was born too soon, especially when I see all the delightful clothes that youth can wear and the ease with which they can travel the world. Then again, I would hate to have missed all the experiences of living through the first 70 years of this century with all its changes.

No children of today have that feeling of magic I have when I press the button of my colour television and see at once something happening at that very moment the other side of the world. While my fridge, shower, and air-conditioned house are a great joy to me, I can still go outside and study the ways of the ants, look at the sky and know the weather, the smell of the morning telling me whether it will be a hot day.

I have the best of both worlds and both sides of the generation gap. I do not need to worry about money, so I have time to be interested in everyone and everything. While I remain so, I have reached my second childhood to compensate me for having lost my first youth. I hope to remain this way and realize my ambition to see the turn of the century.

Frances Mary (*alias* Fairy, Fair and Wendy) Deacon. Kalamunda, WA, 1978