

‘ADDRESS’ FROM HULDAH TURNER
TO DR. DOUGLAS HUXLEY

4 March, 1992.

To:

Dr. Douglas Huxley,
The University of Newcastle.

Dear Douglas,

Here are a few reminiscences of the early college days. Maybe I am duplicating much that you already have and maybe I have omitted much and many names that should be included but I have tried not to cross into the territory of the Union Street booklet.

Huldah Turner.

Newcastle Teacher's College opened in 1948, a branch of the New South Wales Education Department, with Griffith H. Duncan as its Foundation Principal.

I arrived in it's third year in 1951. At that time, and through my seventeen years at the college, it was devoted exclusively to teacher training. Three types of teacher training were offered: Infants, Primary, and small schools.

In those days before the feeder bus system there were a number of small schools in the Hunter Valley, e.g., Bob's Farm, Salt Ash, Minmi and a few schools out in the lake area such as Awaba.

Later, an acute shortage of high school teachers prompted the training of junior secondary teachers. [Tape Break] English, History, Social Studies, Home Economics, Biology, Mathematics, Manual Arts, Art in Association with the Technical College Art School and Music with the aid of the fledgling Conservatorium of Music. These were all intensive two year courses with the occasional mature age students doing end-on training after a Tech College or Music qualification.

It was an infamous arrangement, though these courses were designed for teaching pupils at the junior secondary school range, students were posted often to schools where they taught with graduates and were required to teach senior secondary classes without the status or the promise of promotion afforded graduates.

Many indeed, when the opportunity offered, converted their training to degrees and postgraduate degrees. A great number of infant, Primary and small school teachers did the same and now occupy prestigious positions in the Education Department's Colleges and Universities.

Then, when the University was established, the college provided the training of teacher trainee graduates for the Diploma in Education. The calendars for those years indicated accurately the nature and scope of the academic structures of the courses.

The basis of the training scheme was three-fold:

- a) To introduce efficient teachers into the Departmental schools
 - b) To provide a broad base for culture as the background to teaching techniques
- and
- c) To enable teachers to enter into the community life, wherever they were posted, and to participate and hopefully act as leaders.

So it was apart from the compulsory courses that a number of cultural options were offered, and every student was required to join one option. There was art, music, needlework, drama, maths, physical education and other options. There were, too, many extra curricular activities; clubs, inter-collegian visits, excursions, college camps, swimming schools, debating and so on.

It was inevitable that many options strengthened and were strengthened by sister clubs, especially in music, physical education and drama. Competitive sports, music productions, the special emphasis on Gilbert & Sullivan, drama productions grew out of these. My particular interest was drama so I may be forgiven for giving a special mention to that.

At this late time it is hard to remember whether the whether the club or option produced this, that or the other play, but in my seventeen years there were many productions. Most staff were involved in club productions whether they were in the Drama Club or Drama Option or not.

When I turned up at the College in February 1951, I was shocked to learn that in April I had to mount the re-enactment of the fiftieth anniversary of the Foundation of the Commonwealth as an item in a massive open air celebration on the Sports oval. One of the dignitaries in this re-enactment was none other than Kevin Gosper of Olympic fame.

Frantic preparations began at once. Braided gowns from scarlet cloth and wigs from cotton wool were concocted for judges. Authentic period gowns were designed and made by the Needlework department under the expert guidance of Leila Whittle and Bishop's and Archbishop's regalia were kindly lent by Canon Single from St. Peter's Anglican Church, Hamilton. A Royal Salute was provided at the occasion by Mr. Philip Marquet of Newcastle Boy's High School.

The following year Philip was to join the College staff and until my retirement he and I worked very close together in the field of drama.

The first drama production of 1951 came out of an option; it was Eugene O'Neil's *Emperor Jones*. This was the first Australian production of this play and the hero Emperor was none other than Douglas Huxley, later to become Principal of the College in its HIHE status and later, Deputy Vice-Chancellor of The University of Newcastle after amalgamation in 1989.

For the first of my seventeen years, the College was housed in a section of the Newcastle Tech High School at Broadmeadow, now Merewether High School, and though we were cramped there, we did have a beautiful brand new hall to work in. It wasn't until we lost it that we realised how splendid it was but we were guilty. On the night of the performance of *Emperor Jones* a misfired blank tore a great jagged hole in the inner lining of the very fine stage curtains. The ammunition for this incident and the blanks, were provided to me by the then unknown, Philip Marquet.

In 1952 we moved into our temporary home in Union Street, Cooks Hill. Broadmeadow had at least been solid bricks and mortar but these new temporary quarters were aluminium army huts. Narrow wooden railed in intersecting verandahs gave entrance to room after room strung out along their lengths. Altogether there were six such blocks ingeniously enclosing two quadrangles. The verandahs were open to wind, rain and all weathers and so were the quadrangles. Assemblies of students were held here in the open air if the weather permitted it. As some kind of concession to the decencies a small area of brick was built into the base of the Administration quarters overlooking Union Street and carried the name of the Institution Newcastle Teacher's College.

There were no pavings and in heavy rain the entrance up to the wooden steps was blocked off by a lake, the seagulls loved it. Perhaps it was the threat of flooding or perhaps it was the uneven nature of what looked like flat land that made the planners put the verandahs some feet above the ground level.

As the 'temporary' converted to 'permanent' we began to agitate for an Assembly Hall. In the eleventh year, one was finally built and a very fine hall it was. No longer did we have to borrow some school hall for our productions. We had our own and we almost lived in it until late into the night. By day it was a gym and an Assembly Hall. By night it was alive with a multitude of activities; Gilbert & Sullivan debutees, drama addicts, gymnasts, exhibitors, dancers and debaters.

When the College participated in Dip Ed Awards it was made compulsory for every Dip. Ed student, no matter what faculty he/she came from to be involved in the production of a three-act play. Most memorable of these were Kay Flannagan's *Medea*, Colin Anderson's *Emperor Jones* (it's second round) with stage settings designed by Tony Tripp and a sequence of Irish plays.

Then we needed a bigger and better library and that was an interesting piece of construction. The builders were trying to find a suitable site for foundations and all over the campus; holes were dug only to fill with water about two feet down. These had to be cordoned off for safety's sake. It appeared that the college was sitting on a reclaimed marshland so that they had to float a concrete inverted base, rather like an upturned concrete cone, and built the library over that. The hall it appeared was built on an old sandpit projecting into the marsh and so was on sound foundations.

Meanwhile the staff battled on under these adverse conditions. Poor lecture rooms, crammed library, inadequate storage space, no temperature control and a very, very small administrative staff.

There was the well-loved Scottish Mr. Baxter, the Caretaker, who would trust no-one with the keys of his kingdom. Every afternoon he checked lights out and locked every one of fifty three doors before finally locking the gate into Union Street.

There were at first, in Administration, only a Registrar and a Secretary but in the second decade four secretarial staff were added and there was one aid to the Manual Arts Department and one to the Home Science Department.

From the beginning of the University the College had close association with it. First there were the conversion courses. A two year course was provided at the University for Tech/Diploma Graduates to continue to a University degree. The

College staff and some others were asked to program a humanities strand and to lecture in it.

These were the days before equal pay for the sexes but we were assured that in this instance equal pay would be the order of the day. It was my role to plan and coordinate the program. All went well until the final term of the second year the two women lecturers in the program were called to the University and advised that there had been an error. We should have been paid only eighty percent of the male fee. We were given two options: to pay back in a lump sum the over-payment over the two years or to work the rest of the year unpaid. We had to settle of course for the second, but with much bitterness. Needless to say that was the end of that particular arrangement.

In my time, though we worked hard, there was a deal of social pleasure, and I remember the drama camps with a special satisfaction. On a weekend before the three-act play was to be performed the cast and crew went into a rehearsal camp. Our venue in the early days was the YWCA camp at Coal Point. Usually Philip Marquet and I conducted the camp and other involved lecturers joined while Leila Whittle looked after the catering. To be included in the camp was regarded as a very special privilege. It was a happy working time and in between there was plenty of fun. Later we took twin cottages at Nelson's Bay. [TAPE BREAK]

Harold Gillard, who was Head of the Department of Physical Education, had a profound influence on college life. Apart from his own program in lecturing he organised many extra curricular activities for the college.

One was the inter-collegiate visits, Armidale, Wagga, Sydney, Bathurst. These inter-collegian visits not only engendered sportsmanship in competitions and a lively team spirit but also provided windows onto the way other colleges coped with their work and play.

Another activity, organised by Harold, was the end-of-year Swimming School. Every student was expected to make the best swimming grade possible and down at Merewether Baths, under the expert tuition of Harold, Philip Marquet, Colin Doyle, Judy Cowley, Kath Abernethy, Helen Moller and others, a strict training program went into action. All lecturers on the staff were involved in these swimming schools in one role or another, checking attendance, marshalling, keeping watch, recording and so on.

Harold also organised the college camps. While half of the students were at work in the swimming school the other half went to the college camp. This was a very happy event in the college calendar. The two separate batches went into week long residences at Richmond Youth Camp, Yarramundi for a strenuous period of work

and play. There were of course a few minor upheavals. The Cocks River was attractive, the summer nights had a special appeal and a near neighbour declared that his oranges were steadily disappearing. We got to know each other better in this week than in a whole year of lecture room contacts.

When I left the college in early 1967, we were still dreaming of our "permanent campus" and wondering if it was, after all, an unattainable pipe dream. However, in spite of our primitive campus those who knew the Union Street Experience claimed that it had camaraderie and a warm fierce loyalty unique in similar institutions. It had to be experience to be understood.

This spirit was initiated and engendered by its Foundation Principal, Grif Duncan, a man of massive intellect, wide ranging cultural interests and infinite compassion.

He put students and staff before self and all who worked with him came to know his stature; unfaltering integrity, dedication to his college and profound understanding.

He loved his college. He was fiercely proud of it and he fought all the way for his better world.

The college motto of course was his:

“AD MELIOREM MUNDUM”

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