

# OLD AGGIES

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**Alstonville luncheon** – Monday 20 September 2021 at Federal Hotel, Alstonville. Contact Geoff Jacobs 0412 107 727 or [gajacobs@bigpond.com](mailto:gajacobs@bigpond.com)

**Armidale/Tamworth luncheon** – 2021, Bendemeer Hotel – contact Dr Barbara Vanselow 0434 344 992 or [bvanselo@gmail.com](mailto:bvanselo@gmail.com)  
 Waiting on COVID vaccinations for members in the area.

**Gosford luncheon** – Thursday 4 November 2021 – Central Coast Leagues Club – contact Geoff Warr (02) 4342 3226 or 0411 128 936 or [warries@optusnet.com.au](mailto:warries@optusnet.com.au)

**Laurieton luncheon (cancelled)** – February 2021, Laurieton United Services' Club, contact Geoff Jacobs 0412 107 727 or [gajacobs@bigpond.com](mailto:gajacobs@bigpond.com)

**Orange luncheon** – Wednesday 13 October 2021, Best Western Ambassador Motel. Contact Len Banks (02) 6361 7677 or [banks@lmbanks.com.au](mailto:banks@lmbanks.com.au)

**Sydney luncheon** – December 2021, City of Sydney RSL Club. Contact Col Short (02) 9876 1018 or [cbshort@bigpond.com](mailto:cbshort@bigpond.com)

**Wagga Wagga luncheon** – 13 May 2021, held at the Wagga Wagga Agricultural Institute – contact James Hamilton 0447 225 875 or [jnch1950\\_1@bigpond.com](mailto:jnch1950_1@bigpond.com)  
 Report in the next newsletter.

## Subscriptions \$10 per annum due

Subs can be paid by direct deposit into the Commonwealth Bank BSB 06-2263, Account No 00903542, Account Name Agricultural Retired Officers Association (please add your surname) or by cheque to Colin Short, 27 Chesterfield Road, Epping NSW 2121.

## From The President's Desk

At the 2021 AGM the following were elected: Dr Frank Doughty (President), Graham Linnegar (Secretary), Col Short (Treasurer and Membership), Lawrie Lucas-Smith (Auditor), John Bowler (Newsletter Editor) and Barry Jensen (Assistant Editor).

We hope 2021 is slowly bringing us back to pre Covid times allowing us to hold our regional gatherings/luncheons. Old Aggie luncheons are a great way to renew old friendships as well as get to know former colleagues in different sections of NSW Department of Agriculture. I extend an invitation for your continued support of our organisation.

Regional luncheons have greatly strengthened Old Aggies so my thanks and best wishes go to the local organisers for successful gatherings in 2021.

Wishing all a Covid free year – *Frank Doughty, President*

## Ian Armstrong, former NSW Deputy Premier died 15 December 2020 at 83

By Andrew Marshall



*Ian Armstrong relaxed in retirement in 2011 with a copy of The Land newspaper. He recalled at the time there was always a copy of The Land in his truck, farm ute or the car he travelled in throughout the state electorate of Lachlan.*

A State funeral was held on 22 February 2021 for former Boorowa grazier, Ian Armstrong, whose 25-year career in NSW politics included solid stints as Agriculture Minister, Nationals Leader and Deputy Premier.

Mr Armstrong, who shot to prominence in the 1970s as a cocky, straight talking campaigner in the Cattlemen's Union of Australia, died on Wednesday 15/12/2020, aged 83.

He had served in the NSW Parliament as the Cowra-based Member for Lachlan between 1981 and 2007, and for five years was Agriculture and Rural Affairs Minister until 1993.

He was responsible for relocating the then NSW Agriculture department's head office from central Sydney's McKell Building to Orange in 1992, in what was to be the largest decentralisation project undertaken by a government.

Between 1993 until 1995 he was Minister for Ports and Public Works and Deputy Premier to Liberal and Coalition Government leader John Fahey, who died in September, 2020.

The NSW government announced his death, describing Mr Armstrong as embodying what it was to be a rural advocate.

Current deputy Nationals leader and Member for Bathurst Paul Toole paid tribute to the popular former MP saying he was remembered as a passionate advocate for rural and regional NSW, and a fine gentleman who would be missed, particularly across Central West NSW where he was best known.

"Ian Armstrong was a true champion for the bush," Mr Toole said.

"It took hours to walk through a room with Ian – he knew everyone and, more importantly, cared about the issues that mattered to them.

"A giant of the Nats, he knew what it took to make regional economies hum and fought to make it a reality, creating jobs in the regions and advocating for stronger connections over the mountains to the Central West."

Mr Armstrong's agri-political career had begun on the family wool and beef property at Boorowa on the South West Slopes after he returned home from a period working in northern Australia soon after leaving Sydney's Newington College in 1953.

He moved to Cowra to campaign for and win the newly-created seat of Lachlan in 1981, after Member for Young, George Freudenstein, opted to retire after 22 years when his electorate was broken up.

Mr Armstrong was, in fact, the only Member for Lachlan, as the state electorate was abolished in another redistribution when he stood down in 2007.

After leaving parliament he worked in retirement as a consultant and advisor to business, community groups and government, including becoming the

inaugural chairman of Central Tablelands Local Land Services.

The state government's official statement also paid tribute to Mr Armstrong's work in regional communities.

"Ian will be dearly missed and his tireless work for the people of NSW and to the NSW Nationals will live on forever."

*Courtesy The Land newspaper.*

## **David Croft Memoirs**

David Croft, retired Agricultural Protection Officer, at Wagga has sent me a copy of his memoirs. David kept meticulous diaries as well as having a great memory and, although his story was written primarily for his family, it has provided a great description on his life and work in the Department of Agriculture/Primary Industries since the 1960s. It is well illustrated with photos and names stimulating great recollections of earlier times in the Department.

Having read his memoirs I am most impressed, it really is a great story of his career and the interface between the technical staff of the Department and our clients and other stakeholders at the coalface. It is David's story and reflects all sorts of things about David Croft the man, as well as a lot of things about the Department. David started off with me as a Stock Attendant at Trangie in 1969, progressing through various roles with the Noxious Animals group at Glenfield, Condobolin and Cowra and becoming an authority on rabbit and fox control. Continuing his education David was awarded his BA from Armidale and his Master of Science from the University of NSW in 1991. David was highly regarded by all states and in New Zealand for his expertise in vertebrate pest control programs and has been widely used as a consultant and trainer across the state and country. His relationship with the Rural Lands Protection Boards, valuable for both organisations, has provided a wealth of stories and learning experiences.

David is a great raconteur, with an endless supply of yarns and experiences which he has shared. He is highly regarded both as a Keynote and an After Dinner speaker across the state for various organisations and has recorded many of these experiences in his memoirs.

I believe this is a valuable document for the future historians when looking at the agricultural industries, the role of Government, and the various threats of introduced pests such as rabbits, foxes

mice and pigs and issues like plague locusts control and emergency management roles of the Department of Agriculture. David ends his departmental story with a quote from Roger Southwood, previously Regional Director of Agriculture at Dubbo: "In the past, district advisory officers have fiercely protected their independence to the extent that, in some instances, although employed by the Department, people have really worked for the community in the Department rather than for the Department in the community. The opportunity for this to continue is however diminishing very quickly." David's story really does illustrate this relationship and the mutual benefits resulting from this. Roger retired over 30 years ago and the changes to the functions and operations of the organisation since has changed the way the industries and rural communities view the role of Government but his quote and David's story will strike an accord with some of our Old Aggies.

Although David has not published his memoirs he has it available as a PDF file and is happy to email it to anyone interested. Contact David on [crofty1080@southernphone.com.au](mailto:crofty1080@southernphone.com.au)

*John Bowler*

## **Bathurst Rail Museum**

I was fortunate to visit the new Bathurst Rail Museum recently. It was opened in 2020 but was closed as a result of the Covid-19 virus and only opened again in February 2021. As well as the obvious focus on the railways it also featured a display panel on Robert Peacock, an early Manager of the Bathurst Experiment Station, who also made a significant contribution to the public, social and political life of Bathurst in the early Twentieth century.

He also played a key role in the "Better Farming Train" also featured at the Museum and which travelled around NSW from 1927–1929. The train, based on American and Victorian models, was an educational facility, a mobile agricultural college, to assist farmers to increase production and control pests and diseases.

It consisted of a sheep wagon, cattle wagon, 14 louvre display vans, including a lecture theatre, and dining and sleeping cars. Professional staff travelled with the train to provide practical demonstrations and lectures on livestock, with sheep, dairy cattle with cream, butter and cheese production, and poultry, pasture improvement,



*A lecture on pure bred stock. Photo courtesy NSW State Archives*





*Growing pastures (Illustrating beneficial effects of superphosphates). Photo courtesy NSW State Archives*

weed identification and control and pest and disease control. The lecturers on the train included Veterinarians H P Black and Max Henry, Vic Brann – Poultry, Aub Cantrill – Sheep and AWS Moodie – Agrostologist – names still familiar to some of the Old Timers still with us.

Lorna Byrne, one of the first graduates in Agricultural Science from Sydney University, was the first professional female employed by the Department of Agriculture, gave lectures on family life, leadership and community involvement. Lorna went on to be leading agriculturalist working with the ABC, The Land and Red Cross later recognised with a CBE for her contribution to the rural communities and agricultural extension.

Additionally the Department of Health provided an exhibit and lectured on maternal and baby welfare. The Rural Bank was also involved with information on rural financing.

The statistics are impressive, the train travelled 8734 miles (over 14,500 Kms), visited 146 towns giving 609 lectures or demonstrations to an estimated 629,146 people. Unfortunately I have not been able to obtain statistics on the FBT display semitrailer of the 1990s.

Further reading – *Bathurst National Advocate* 9 August 1927, *Mudgee Guardian* 7 November 2018, *Lachlander and Condobolin and Western Districts Recorder* 27 June 1928 – John Bowler

### **Agricultural Extension on the north coast of NSW**

John Robson ex District Agronomist and Assistant Principal Extension Officer on the North Coast from 1957 to 1999 has provided a great story on his experiences. His involvement with the Agricultural Bureau, the rapidly changing dairy industry on the North coast and the relatively frequent flood events make interesting reading. The close working relationships between District staff, their clients and Head Office provide some insights into the workings of the Department in rural areas.

A couple of paragraphs set the scene:

*“My introduction to agricultural extension took place in Grafton in 1957 when I was appointed District Agronomist in an area extending from the Nambucca River, north past Yamba and west to Dorrigo and Hernani. The beat had the highest number of rural holdings of any agronomist’s districts.*

*To help me I had 15 Agricultural Bureau branches, an extension services grant Field Assistant Alan Davis, a dairy industry extension grant organiser, an office girl, Barbara Burlless, later Jacaranda Queen, and a professional colleague Jimmy Hardy, Dairy Officer"*

*And "I think that the early post war years were the golden years for most rural industries. Dairymen in the Milk Board area had protected markets, margarine production was controlled, a hoard of producer boards held customers to ransom and the wool boom due to the Korean war saw wool prices reaching astronomical heights"*

The article is a bit long to include in the Newsletter but is attached to the email Newsletter and has been placed on the Old Aggies web site. The Editor is happy to send a separate copy to any members who request a hard copy.

## **Memories of Mike Stannard**

Michael was born in Griffith NSW on 29/8/1929 and lived with his family, on the family orchard at Lake Wyangan, a suburb of Griffith. He went to school at Lake Wyangan Public School and then Griffith High School until 1948 where he started a Degree in Agriculture at Sydney University. While on holidays from the University he worked at the Gatton College in Queensland, wheat harvesting in Forbes, grape picking at Irymple, a farm in Cambridge in Tasmania and a dairy farm at Denman, as part of the practical requirements for his degree in agriculture.

Whilst in Tasmania he received a letter from Dr Frank Bowman asking him if he would be interested in a position as a Fruit Research Officer at the Yanco Experiment Farm [as it then was] and he accepted the offer and started working there in 1953. He lived in the officer's quarters there for two and a half years. He left then to help his mother on Farm 1846, Lake Wyangan as his father had passed away a few years earlier. [His father, the late Robert Meredith Stannard, was a surveyor with the Irrigation Commission at Griffith and surveyed much of the land at Griffith to be used as irrigation properties for horticulture farming]. Whilst in Griffith Michael helped establish tile drainage on farms due to salt rising in the soils, caused by the floods in 1956–57 and as a consequence many fruit trees died. With trickle irrigation now, hopefully this does not happen. Irrigation then was by gravity allowing water to stream out from the canals [dethridge wheels showed how much water was used] along furrows, flooding the ground watering of the trees.

We married at Griffith in 1960 and Michael returned to his position at Yanco where we lived at Leeton until a cottage became available on the Experiment Farm. If I remember Michael was helping to produce better peach varieties for the Leetona Canning factory in Leeton among other experiments. Michael was transferred to the lower Murray Horticultural Research Station at Dareton in 1965. In 1967 he was appointed manager of the research station and we lived in the manager's cottage there. Irrigation was achieved by pumping water from the Murray river and overhead sprinklers were used to water many varieties of citrus and experiments were carried out to establish avocado trees also.

In 1971 Michael was appointed to the Sydney head office and became the Principal Viticulturist which allowed him to travel backwards and forwards to the Sunrasia, Griffith, Hunter Valley and Mudgee areas. He retired from this position in 1989 on his 60th birthday when I think the Department moved to Orange. Michael looked forward to seeing friends at the gathering of the Old Aggies and I thank you all for being his MATES.

– *Barbara Stannard*

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Sorry to hear my old boss Mike Stannard passed away. Mike actually employed me in 1971 as the first Clerk at Dareton Ag Research Station. I retired in Wentworth knowing full well the Covid would never come out here ... and it hasn't ... yet.

Mike was a wonderful fellow and a passionate scientist. He was always so active in his senior years and would often catch a bus from Eastwood to Wentworth just to see his favourite Rotary Project, the historic Paddlesteamer *Ruby* which is still based here.

Mike was one of the first Australians to travel to Antarctica as a tourist and I think he was in his eighties then. He had a great life and often came back to visit his many friends from the District.

It's a wonder he lived as long as he did. Many would remember his close shave some years back when he and his wife Barbara were settling down for the night. There was a terrible crash and his wife said "What was that terrible noise," Mike never to be easily rattled, replied "It was just a car landing in my bed!" Apparently a car load of Chinese missed the corner and crashed through the front wall of their house, landing on Barbara's side of the matrimonial bed. Fortunately Barbara had moved to another room as Mike was probably snoring.

Well that was the story Mike related to us when he and Barbara, an old Broken Hill girl, passed through on their way to a reunion at the Hill.

Mike has no doubt been sadly missed by all his family and friends.

Regards Rod Tabrett

## Francis John Hartridge 1925–2019



For Frank (John) Hartridge who passed away at the end of 2019.

Francis John Hartridge was born in Brisbane in 1925. Known as Frank to those in NSW and John, for Queenslanders, he was schooled at the Marist College in both Rosalie and Ashgrove where he completed his sub senior. He left school to take a job in Queensland Government in the Forestry Division where, due to the restrictions on the amount of timber felling allowed on Fraser Island, he would check the arithmetic on the girth of the logs that were felled by the timber mill. He left Forestry for more varied work and then joined the RAAF in 1944 as a wireless air-gunner. Fortunately, the war finished before he was sent on any missions overseas.

He returned to Brisbane and finished his senior at night school. Frank developed a love of the land when staying at the Ryan's property for holidays in West Cooyar. He went on to study a Bachelor

of Agricultural Science at Queensland University, graduating in 1951.

After graduating, Frank joined the NSW Department of Agriculture in Grafton through the suggestion of Frank Crofts and worked on plant breeding and pasture agronomy. Then from 1954–1956 he worked in Head Office in the Department of Agriculture in Sydney.

By 1957, now newly married, he took up a position as the District Agronomist in Orange, where he enjoyed working directly with the local farmers and graziers. He would always remain more content in the rural and regional centres than the larger Head Office in Sydney.

After 3 years, they moved to the warmer climate of Lismore, where again Frank took up the role of District Agronomist. It was here that he became involved in pasture improvement, particularly in the dairy and beef industry. It was here that he became impressed by the new breed of cattle called Brahman taking all his four children to see first Brahman bull in Northern NSW.

In 1965 he took a year off to complete Joan Tully's course the Diploma of Agricultural Extension in Brisbane. He continued throughout his career to talk about the importance of really listening to the farmers and understanding their perspectives, concepts pivotal to Joan's teachings.

In 1974 he moved to Armidale to take up the role with the Department of Agriculture and UNE and CSIRO as Research Extension Liaison Officer. He did extensive work on the Trees on Farms Program and the highlight of his career was publication of book *Pasture Research in New England Region*. Still to this day, the New England area pastures support some of the best super fine wool production in Australia.

He enjoyed his research work particularly some of the overseas grass land conferences. In 1981 he went to the grasslands conference at the University of Kentucky and in 1986 to a conference in Ireland/England and Scotland. These were informative in the work he continued to do in his role with both the University and the Department.

He semi retired in 1985 where he and his wife spent most of their time with family in Brisbane where he maintained his contacts with his colleagues through attending both the 3 Score Club at the University of Queensland and the Old Aggies functions until the time where he could no longer drive the distances required. He retained many friendships, including with Mike Duncan and John



Robson up to his passing. A true gentleman and someone who always had a genuine interest in life and other people.

*Vi-Mary Hartridge*

## Obituary, Clarrie Beckingham 1947–2020



Former Mudgee District Horticulturist Clarence Ronald Beckingham sadly passed away in January 2020 after a long battle with Parkinsons disease. He was buried in the Lue cemetery on January 9th 2020.

Graduating from Wagga Wagga Agricultural College in 1968 he was

first stationed at the Viticultural Research Station at Griffith thus beginning his long career as an advisor in horticulture with NSW Department of Agriculture. His next move by the Department was to Bathurst then followed Mudgee in 1975 as the District Horticulturist. He pioneered that role being the first departmental horticulturist stationed in Mudgee.

As an advisory officer he covered all aspects of production – variety evaluations, soil management, nutrition, pests, diseases and marketing. Not long after being appointed to Mudgee his role expanded from viticulture and other fruit species to also include vegetables. His district was not only Mudgee but covered also surrounding shires which went as far west as Bourke. Some of the industries besides viticulture that he became heavily involved with included – olives, pistachios, processing tomatoes, brassicas (particularly broccoli), sweet corn, peas and potatoes. His responsibility also included advisory work in the intensive irrigation areas of the Macquarie Valley.

Viticulture though always remained his special interest. He was held in enormous regard in all aspects of his advisory work but especially in grape growing and subsequent wine production. A grower once offered this praise – “Clarrie would never leave a stone unturned to find an answer to a curly question”.

In the 1970’s the Mudgee office of the Department at 100 Church St. back in the 1970’s was small and narrow accommodating the District Horticulturist,

the District Agronomist and two office staff. Two other Departments shared the small building – Forestry, a room at the rear and upstairs the Soil Conservation Service. This early interaction stood him in good stead as his work often involved working with other government departments throughout his career.

When Clarrie arrived in 1975, Mudgee was experiencing a hobby farm boom which generated enormous enquiry. This led to many discussions in the Mudgee office on how best to handle these. With the collaboration of local Mudgee staff, Dubbo Regional staff and sponsorship from Mudgee Beef Promotion Society it was decided that the best way to get information out was to publish a Small Farmer’s Handbook and hold a Small Farm Field Day. These initial goals were met in 1977 with 600 attending the first Small Farm Field Day and the handbook was so successful two more reprints were done and distributed throughout NSW to district offices.

In 1985 he was appointed to Maitland to carry on his advisory work in the Hunter region. His career continued to advance which saw him travel throughout much of NSW advising and presenting reports to growers and industry. He was a prolific writer of technical papers that were widely distributed to growers and related industries. Many of these today can be found in national and state libraries.

Clarrie returned to Mudgee in the 90’s to enjoy working back in his old district. His battle with Parkinson’s disease no doubt influenced his early decision to retire from flying and a few years later from NSW Agriculture. After his diagnosis he formed a local support group which was welcomed by many in the community also suffering the same debilitating disease.

Clarrie attributed his dedication and application to his work to his training as a pilot and his 26 years of flying. To quote his own words “flying was my absolute passion – a great training ground not only for airmanship but also for discipline, punctuality, and attention to detail”. He called himself a ‘weekend warrior’ as much of his 648 hours of flying was recreational at weekends. He was however able to pilot himself on official Agricultural business if head office deemed it cost effective. This was often the case as his expertise led him all over NSW and sometimes interstate.

Clarrie Beckingham’s contribution to the horticultural industry – Mudgee and beyond was extraordinary and his dedication and integrity will always be remembered.

*Article courtesy 23 January 2020, Mudgee Guardian*

## Bob Sproule in Memoriam



Robert Stinson Sproule, known to his friends as Bob, departed this world on Christmas Eve 2020. Bob's death was the culmination of a severe stroke that he suffered in early 2018. This stroke severely

incapacitated him and resulted in nearly 3 years of being bedridden.

I have prepared the following words not so much as a lifelong friend of Bob, as many of his Department of Agriculture colleagues were, but through a prism of how he impacted upon me at a young age and then through his mentoring and support helped me charter my life's professional journey. He developed in me a confidence and self-belief that enabled me to involve myself in some of the best positions that the old NSW Agriculture could possibly offer from the 1980's and then through to my retirement from NSW DPI in 2015. This initial working relationship in 1985 developed into a wonderful friendship that lasted 35 years.

In life, if we are fortunate, we can experience the best of people and sometimes the best of the best of people. This later category was the domain of Bob Sproule.

Bob was an outstanding leader of people following that classic definition of leadership where he made things happen where others could not. This characteristic involved Bob bringing others who worked for him with him on many a quest that he made exciting and rewarding in equal measures. Bob could make people jump through hoops and do cartwheels afterwards, you just wanted to be on board in one of his many exciting projects.

Bob started his career as a competent district horticulturist with the Department of Agriculture however as a leader in extension is where he really made his mark. Extension is at times all things to all people, but it was beneficial change for agriculture and its proponents where Bob was leading the charge.

Bob had a career that spanned over 35 years with the Department of Agriculture and its numerous

name changes. I only worked with Bob directly for 5 years between 1985 to 1990. In those years Bob was inexhaustible. He formed multi-disciplinary teams working on fodder trees for the next drought, "Gear Up and Throttle Back" with the Ag Mechanisation Officers, the Bega Demonstration Dairy Farm where somehow Bob managed to procure electronic transponders for the farm's milking cows in the 1980's when the industry waited another 20 years before they were apparent. As far as picking winners Bob had no peer. In the 1980's he confided in me that there is something in this greenhouse effect, we need to research and get on board – sadly, those in positions of influence didn't have Bob's insights. His coup de grace was certainly the Farm Cheque program initiated in 1987. He had the vision and then developed a team to support it. A whole farm business management project it was simply devised to enable extensionists to quantify advice in dollar terms. The initial objective was lost in the complexity of such a radical concept within the Department. However, for the mixed farming community of Central NSW it was a god send in those critical days of obscene interest rates, it changed the business culture of many for the better. Beneficial change writ large.

This is but a glimpse of a man who was humble, who never sought the limelight that was all in contradiction to the same person who played professional Rugby League, was a boxer of some renown and according to his peers from college possessed extraordinary strength with a massive power to weight ratio in his favour. Graham Gregory once mentioned to me that he never felt safer than when addressing irate Riverina grape growers with Bob by his side. This background was never mentioned, and any details had to be prised out of Bob. One night, it may have been after a walk and a customary ice cream, Bob never was a boozier, I asked Bob – "why is it that for a man who is credited with so many bouts you have hardly a mark on you?" He responded, "well Tim most of my fights didn't last very long" and that was that.

Bob as a young person had to endure an affliction, a speech impediment, that with hard work he overcame. This coupled with bad acne caused him some embarrassment and he would at times take the back lanes home from school to avoid others. These early days set him up to be an empathetic, understanding, thoughtful and considerate person. These qualities endeared him to others and enabled him to identify individuals that formed cohesive and happy teams who achieved great things.



Bob is survived by Fay, his loving and utterly devoted wife of 59 years, his sons John and Graham and their partners Dessirae and Chris, his daughter Elizabeth and six grandchildren and four great grandchildren.

Bob Sproule undoubtedly is owed much by many who worked for him and with him – I am but one of the many in his lifetime that he supported and allowed to have a wonderful professional life due to his example and support.

Bob, rest in peace and may God hold you in the palm of his hand.

– Tim Burfitt, Orange

## We remember John Betts



John Betts, District Agronomist in the Clarence and Coffs regions for 35 years, passed peacefully at his home in Grafton on 21/11/20.

John, a Wagga Ag graduate, began his agronomy training at the research station in Grafton, where

he met his wife and life-long partner, Lyn. Further training followed at research stations in Glen Innes and Tamworth. In 1967, John succeeded John Robson as District Agronomist in Grafton.

Over the following five years, John studied externally at the University of New England to graduate with his BA.

During John Betts' years as DA in Grafton, he had overseen many changes, and repercussions of those changes, within the industries.

In the 60's, the North Coast region was well known for its dairy production, with about 440 farms in the district. These farms produced mostly cream in cans and whole milk for Peter's ice cream factory.

With the radical shift in industry dynamics, from cream in cans, to bulk whole milk collection, the number of dairy farms declined. There was a significant shift from dairy to beef, and to cane production on the river flats.

In addition to these changes, there was a large decrease in the size of many coastal farms, with productive land being subdivided, and smaller farms becoming a 'part time job' as they were non-viable. Hence there became an increased need for additional income off farm.

Despite these challenges, John embraced them in his stride, and continued to support the agricultural industries of the North Coast. Everyone admired John's knowledge and exceptional ability to help each producer in the most appropriate way.

As DA, John provided up to date advisory services on pastures and field crops.

Results emanating from the research programs in grass and legume species, sowing techniques, varieties, fertilisers and appropriate land management were introduced by John to producers; through one on one interactions, which John enjoyed most, field days, newspaper articles, printed 'AgNotes' and group meetings.

His enjoyment in chatting to farmers in the paddock, enabled him to exchange information comfortably, mostly with a smile, a laugh and then a cuppa.

### Updated Mailing List

As you all would appreciate, the cost of postage has increased dramatically. In an effort to keep our costs down we ask that anyone who would prefer to receive the newsletters via email to advise the editor John Bowler at [jkpbowler@bigpond.com](mailto:jkpbowler@bigpond.com) Please advise the Secretary/Treasurer of changes to contact details.

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These were always the best opportunity for John to get to know his clients better, understanding their attitudes to risk, the quality of their assets, and family dynamics. This knowledge was critical for the successful uptake of new and exciting changes available to enhance profitability.

These 'one on one, in the field' exchanges were important to John as he was 'a reluctant starter' in embracing new IT advances.

The working hours of NSW Ag. extension/advisory staff were never 9 to 5. Particularly during those days when mobile phones and text messages were not yet accessible, John would always return calls after hours from producers who had at last returned home from their farm work.

John also worked closely with the beef research team at the Grafton Research Station, offering advice on choice of pasture species, irrigation and fertiliser requirements for the best quality pastures, and for vastly differing pasture involved in this extensive program.

For a number of years, as a member of an agricultural team, John was involved in an aid project in Sri Lanka. The team visited for about 3 months each year, during the 'dry', to work with and help local farmers to raise productivity of their pastures.

John loved socialising, and worked hard at the research station for social gatherings, particularly the Christmas parties, where he often found himself the centre of attention as Santa in the sleigh with little gifts for the children.

John's passions, beside his family, were fishing and rugby. John had a small tinny in which he loved to fish for bass, flathead and bream. He also loved beach fishing for tailor, which he hot smoked to perfection. After retirement, John became passionate about fly fishing, and excelled at creating his own lures. Annually he visited 'the Cape', and often fished from charter boats for 'the big ones'.

Further, John was always involved in community work. He was a life member of both the Apex club and the South Grafton Bowling club where he also served on the board for many years. He was also a long-term supporter of the Rugby club. Whenever there was a need for help, John would be there.

We miss you John, both professionally and in your many voluntary contributions.

Hope the fish are currently there in plenty, for you to catch and release.

Your old work mates – *Helen Hearnshaw*

## Recent deaths



**Donald Francis Battese** Ex Dairy Officer, 24 January 1948 – 7 April 2021.



**Victor George Barnes**, Died 24 May 2021, aged 98. Formerly of Girades Hill, Lismore. Ex Senior Cattle Tick Inspector.

The editor wishes to express his interest in future articles on the contribution of the Primary Industries/ Department of Agriculture staff across the state and the various industries. It is appreciated that COVID-19 has limited our activities but has increased people's interests in reading and history – we need your contributions! Emails have made it easier and much simpler to include larger articles. We ask you to update your mailing list from snailmail to email. Thank you.