

LOOKING FOR A GOOD BOOK

An unpublished memoir by Reg Thomson

Chapter 8: 'Out by the same door as in I went'

There was no time or inclination for books in the Army. One seemed in a state of suspended animation, with normality on hold, whilst a completely different persona took over until it ended and the switch was turned on again. I went back to the Y.M.C.A. in 1946, until early in 1947, when I was accepted by the University of Adelaide, under the Commonwealth Reconstruction Scheme, for study towards a Diploma in Social Science. At that time the University did not offer Degrees in this subject with the Diploma normally linked to a BA, over a period of four years. The Diploma took about 2¼ years which I, along with other ex-servicemen students, thought was long enough - on top of 5 years in the Army - to be out of the work force. If I had matriculated the situation would have been different, but, as I hadn't, a degree and Diploma would take five years. Looking back, I often regretted not being able to complete the double, although there is no doubt my career and subsequent life would have been less interesting.

Life changed dramatically at this point. A generous family, Dr and Mrs Welch, plus four children, took me into their spacious home for the first 12 months of University studies, and taught me many graces. A soldier's life is not noted for social accomplishments, but the Welch family were kind and patient. Among other interests, they helped me to an appreciation of classical music, taking me along with them to the regular ABC concerts in the Adelaide Town Hall. Most of the artists I saw perform are now dead, including Isaac Stern and the legendary Arthur Rubenstein. I learned to differentiate between a symphony and a concerto, along with a working knowledge of the main compositions by Chopin, Beethoven, Mozart, and other concert favourites. It was a wonderful experience even though it came so late in my life. I also had my first taste of live theatre when Laurence Olivier appeared in *Richard III* at the Town Hall.

The Social Science course was cleverly constructed to cater for those whose interests went beyond case-work. Sociology, social history, economics, and economic history, were mostly Arts subjects, common to quite a few degrees. The broad spectrum meant a range of reading that opened up a completely new world to one with my limited background. Adelaide University has always been regarded as more 'ivy' than 'red brick', with many of its staff elderly and long in tenure. Douglas Mawson, of Antarctic fame, was Professor of Geology, McKellar Stuart, (better known as Michael Innes, detective story writer) had just left when I arrived, Professor J.M. Mitchell, author of *Structure and Growth of the Mind*, was Chancellor, whilst his son, Mark, with whom I became friendly because of his interest in the Adelaide Y, was Professor of Biology, and responsible for my course in nutrition. Mark, in turn, also served as Chancellor of the University.

All in all, a conservative place - psychology, as I have already mentioned, was strictly McDougall and instinctive - none of this behaviourist stuff, such as was the fare at Sydney University! A young Professor, Brian Tew, taught Economics - I still remember his opening lecture which he introduced with an extract from *Alice in Wonderland* - the bit where the Cheshire Cat gradually disappears leaving behind only its grin.

The course was interesting, with its orientation towards community structure and development, as well as case-work, helping my future career. Practical work took me to the counselling section of the Department of Education, where I worked with the psychiatrist and psychologist. Then I did three months with the Department of Social Services, the Commonwealth Department responsible for pensions and all forms of social rehabilitation. We were sent to Melbourne, where the Melbourne University supervised our training among juvenile offenders and handicapped children. One young delinquent, I recall, had tossed a bomb into a crowded cinema! Other placements included three months at the Repatriation Hospital where I learned that tuberculosis was still a killer. One of my clients, a young ex-serviceman, died whilst I was trying to help him. Another interesting time was spent with the social work department of the Red Cross which housed the file of one of my war-time friends who tried to jump out of a plane when being brought home after a nervous breakdown. I also had an enjoyable stint at the Adelaide Y, where I was well known.

Adelaide is not a big city and the University was hard pressed to find suitable placements for its students. It was a great joy to me in the years ahead to be able to take students from Adelaide, Melbourne, and Brisbane, for training in Papua New Guinea.

The course included nutrition, for which prior studies in chemistry were required. My ragged education so far had not touched on this mystical discipline so I had to do a six months course to bring me to Year I of University level. This, together with some of the more barren tracts of economics, (another subject not previously encountered), meant much burning of midnight oil. Other than these two hurdles, I found I was coping, although I must admit I worked a wee bit harder than most. My friends appreciated an ability to take lecture notes verbatim in a kind of shorthand - mostly because, when I typed them up, copies were distributed. This earned me their gratitude, but did nothing for my handwriting, which remains a curiosity to this day.

My book collection expanded, with additions from the "Thinker's Library", a series of small cheap books aimed at presenting the world as a rational entity, rather than a divine enterprise. My philosophy of life, at that time, inclined more to the former point of view, i.e. the rational, although, like all young men, I had bouts of enthusiasm for any number of beliefs, including a brief interest in socialism. The uncertainty persists to this day, together with a marked distaste for fanatical beliefs of any kind. I find difficulty in belonging to organisations with codes based on anything other than common sense. Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Philosophy* gave me some inkling of man's attempts to come to grips with serious thought. On the whole, Adelaide University suited my timid searching, and certainly presented few challenges to orthodoxy. I rather like Omar's view:

"Myself when young did eagerly frequent
Doctor and Saint and heard great Argument

About it and about; but evermore
Came out by the same Door as in I went".

Social science students took no part in the more outrageous excesses of student parades - we were generally regarded as 'odd bods'. My group included half a dozen ex-servicemen, which in itself was unusual, as the course was rarely taken up by men. Then there was a smattering of clergy (mostly part-time), with the rest made up of intelligent girls doing an Arts/Diploma combination. We were a closely knit group, although there was little socialising outside the Uni.

A few peculiar happenings stick in my mind. On one occasion we were required to produce an essay on the effects of slavery in the ancient world as part of our Economic History course. The only reference material was a lengthy article in *Encyclopaedia of Social Science* which, for some odd reason, was held in the Adelaide Public Library, a handsome building next to the University. Some of us got away to an early start, read the article, and jotted down our notes for the essay. Most, however, were not so fortunate when it was discovered the whole segment had been torn out. Our ancient History Professor pleaded, with tears running down his face, for its return, but without success. Another, and more amusing incident, occurred at an examination when I got up and left the room about an hour or so before time was up. The Supervisor stopped me and pleaded for me to try some of the easier questions. My speed of writing saw me out of all examinations well ahead of the rest, so I assured him I had completed enough to get by. Later, I was given a Credit in this particular subject - mainly I believe, because no one could read my writing!

Our practical work was a mixture of nervousness, humour, and sadness. At three of my placements, the social worker, who was to train me, either went on holidays, or got sick, and I was left to my own devices. It's amazing how quickly one learns under such circumstances, although our maturity helped. We always felt hardly done by when vacation time came, as social science students are required to complete a prescribed number of days practical work, as well as a couple of extended placements. But, early in 1949 I finished the course, without any idea of what I wanted to do.

It happened very simply - just a very small ad in the *Adelaide Advertiser* for school teachers in Papua New Guinea. My application was successful and I was appointed an Education Officer IB which I later found out was the lowest form of

educational life. In February, 1949, I set off for the Australian School of Pacific Administration at Middle Head, a beautiful part of Sydney, overlooking the entrance to the Harbour. The area was a military reserve, with part of it allocated to the School. It is still there, although now under a different name as part of Australia's Overseas Aid programme in which my son is now involved. So the wheel turns.

My association with the School, both as a student and, later, as a sometime lecturer, lasted for 24 years, so it deserves fuller treatment than normal. Its history is

bound up with the main players, one of whom was to play a controversial role in Australia's political history. John Kerr devotes a fair amount of space to the School in his autobiography *Matters for Judgement*, which is also an apology for his part in the political tumult of 1975. Kerr, who was called up for army service in 1942 (despite pacifist beliefs), served first as a private in the Army Service Corps at Parkes in N.S.W.

Unbeknown to him, the brother of one of his friends from Fort Street High School (a prominent State-run Secondary School noted for the number of distinguished Australians who passed through it) had set up a rather unique unit at Land Headquarters with the blessing of the Commander in Chief, General Sir Thomas Blamey. Kerr was told that Alf Conlon, the other leading personality, was seeking able recruits for his 'think tank' and had suggested Kerr as a suitable candidate. Although he rejected the offer, Kerr was drafted to the new unit with the rank of Sergeant.

The unit was made up of a number of 'non-soldierly people' mainly academics, nearly all of whom were immediately commissioned with a variety of fairly exalted ranks. John Andrews, for instance, a senior lecturer (and later Professor) from Sydney University became an instant 'Major'. James Plimsoll, a leading diplomat (later Sir John), was equally well rewarded. There was a coterie of others who, in post-war years, went on to become premiers, professors, and prominent pundits. Naturally, the unit was viewed with suspicion by the more conventional members of the Officer's Corps. It was given a vague charter with its early energies devoted to designing an administrative framework should Australia be invaded. When this danger passed, the post-war needs of Papua New Guinea became their focus - at this time that country was largely occupied by Japanese.

Conlon survived a threat to abolish his empire, going on to become answerable solely to Blamey which was, again, anathema to regular soldiers. Kerr was promoted to Lieutenant, while Conlon was at this stage only a Major, although in authority over a couple of Lieutenant-Colonels. The unit was known as the Directorate of Research and Civil Affairs, with new recruits including the poet James MacAuley (then a school teacher), as well as the anthropologists Camilla Wedgwood and Ian Hogbin, from Sydney University. Professor Julius Stone and Camilla became Lieutenant Colonels, making one wonder how the normally rigid rules of Army establishments were circumvented. No doubt it helps to have the Commander in Chief, (as well as the Minister for the Army), on side.

Conlon, a most persuasive man, was given free rein by Blamey and Eddie Ward, the Minister. He established a school at Duntroon to train selected officers for post-war duties in Papua New Guinea, with Colonel J.K. Murray, formerly Principal of Gatton Agricultural College, as Chief Instructor. Ida Leeson, head of the Mitchell Library in Sydney, was given the rank of Major and put in charge of library facilities for the new school.

During 1943, Kerr advanced to his Majority (skipping the three pip bit) and became, in effect, Adjutant to Conlon, who was by now a Lieutenant Colonel. Camilla Wedgwood carried out extensive surveys in Papua New Guinea (where possible), to map an educational programme for the country when peace came. In 1945, partly through Conlon's influence (as Kerr sees it), Colonel Murray was appointed Administrator of Papua New Guinea. By then Kerr had reached the rank of Lieutenant Colonel (not bad for someone who started as a private in 1942), and then made it to full Colonel when he replaced Murray as head of the L.H.Q. School of Civil Affairs. A year later, the school moved from Duntroon to Georges Heights and then to Middle Head, where I joined it. The name was changed to the School of Pacific Administration, or ASOPA, as it has always been affectionately known.

Kerr sought to return to civilian life in 1946 but continued on as Principal until the following year when he was appointed as organiser of the South Pacific Commission. Conlon, by then, had left the Army and was studying medicine at Sydney University when he succeeded Kerr as Principal in 1948. Kerr became interim Secretary of the South Pacific Commission, a post he held until replaced by the first substantive Secretary-General, Mr W.D. Forsyth, an Australian career diplomat.

When I arrived at ASOPA in February, 1949, Conlon was Principal with several members of his Army team still on the staff. Ida Leeson was Librarian, Camilla Wedgwood lectured on anthropology and education, Hal Wootten, a well qualified lawyer, was in charge of legal studies, whilst Jim MacAuley seemed oddly placed as the authority on government. No longer colonels, majors, or captains, they made up an unusual assortment, leavened with a sprinkling of serving officers from New Guinea. Odd they may have been, but there was no doubting their academic attainments or ability to deliver a tertiary standard course of real value.

The full story of the Army Directorate has never been told. Among its early recruits at Duntroon was Anne Robson, later to become official interpreter for the South Pacific Commission, and Kerr's second wife, after she gained a greatly expedited divorce as a result of Kerr's intervention. Charles Rowley, who succeeded Conlon as Principal, gives a general perception of the group: "I had a pretty lengthy experience of how the whole Conlon setup was regarded by the Army brass. Among officers, none of whom knew him, Alf was probably the most unpopular man in the Army. Many people, for instance, who'd been to the Middle East, felt that Alf's methods of getting privates with special qualifications and making them majors or colonels in a day wasn't the right thing to do at all. There was a feeling that here was a fellow who was manipulating the sacred edifice of the Army for his own purposes". Official historians have dismissed it as of no consequence. Paul Hasluck could see little merit in it during the war, and had little time for ASOPA during his long stint as Minister for Territories. Bean, the Official Historian, apparently gives the Directorate a rough time in the last volume of the *Australian War History, The Final Years*. MacAuley, once a chosen favourite, who was later to become a prime mover in securing Conlon's resignation as Principal, wrote "Alf Conlon's Directorate was, of course, an extraordinary organisation and had in it some of the elements of a Renaissance Court with Alf as a Medici Prince".

The Medici Prince reigned for only a short time after I came to ASOPA. The student body was made up of five other aspiring Education Officers, 14 serving officers of the Department of Native Affairs in their second year of a two year Diploma Course, and three young Forestry Officers, who shared most of our course. Most of us were billeted in Army huts at Middle Head, alongside huts filled with Regular Army types on full-time duty. We messed in a dining room where the meals were provided by a man/wife combination whose secret assignment must have been to starve as many P.N.G. staff as they could. Student unrest grew and, I, who by some mistake, had become President of the Students Union, was sent to plead our case with Conlon. Feeling a lot like Oliver Twist, I fronted the great man in his room from which he rarely emerged. Alf took no part in the teaching programme and, indeed, appeared as the dilettante *par excellence*, leading much the same sort of life he enjoyed in the Army. His office was heavily curtained and lit by a table lamp, which, in the middle of the day, produced an eerie atmosphere. It is all so long ago, but I do remember Alf telling me at length of his

problems at Sydney University where it seems members of the academic staff were attempting to thwart his ambitions to become a doctor - possibly because of some incident during the war. At the time, I was ignorant of the resentment building up amongst the staff of ASOPA over his aloofness and reluctance to share the teaching load. I cannot recall whether our lot improved as a result of my two visits to Conlon's office, but I do remember seeing ancient looking tomes stacked on tables. Later it came out that one reason for his resignation was an allegation that he had misused library funds on esoteric books about music in Pacific Islands.

The education group had the Honourable Camilla Wedgwood as its guide and friend. Camilla graduated from Cambridge University, with an M.A. in anthropology, but, like Maria Montessori, was ahead of her time, finding it difficult to find sponsors for field work among the hitherto male dominated discipline of anthropology. She took a job as assistant to Malinowski at Cambridge, where she lectured for a couple of years before enrolling at the London School of Economics for her PHD. She was saved from this by a lengthy series of studies on Manum Island, off the coast of Madang, where she became so involved with the people she always referred to the Island as "her island". In 1934 she lectured at Sydney University, from where she was able to pursue research on Nauru. From 1935 to 1943 she was Principal of the Women's College at Sydney, before becoming a Lieutenant-Colonel in Alf Conlon's Directorate. From this base she carried out two major surveys in Papua New Guinea and, after war, continued as a member of ASOPA's staff.

A daughter of Lord Wedgwood, the pottery king, she wore her 'Honourable' very casually, rolling her own cigarettes and showing a good length of bloomer when hopping over her window sill as a short cut into her room. She was no beauty but her rugged features lit up when she smiled, which was often. She was kind, helpful, and erudite. Her special interest in native education led to her becoming a main contender for the job of Director of Education in Papua New Guinea, which eventually went to Bill Groves, who had taught in Rabaul before the war, and written a book on his plans for education in Papua New Guinea. Bill had spent the war years as a Major in the Army Education Unit, holding an Honours Degree in Anthropology from Melbourne University. Although he and Camilla were more or less aligned on educational policy in the early post-war years, they both had very different view-points when I got to know them.

Our course was centred on comparative studies of education in the colonies of the world, social anthropology, the geography, flora and fauna of Papua New Guinea, colonial administration, language studies, and the techniques of communication. My group were all trained teachers which caused me some concern over the direction I was heading. At Camilla's suggestion I wrote to Bill Groves, pointing out I was not a teacher, although I felt I had something to offer the country. He, in turn spoke to Colonel Murray, the Administrator, who agreed there was room in Papua New Guinea for a person with my interests, directing that a special position of Senior Welfare Officer be created. As a result, my reading was channelled into community development, although I was still required to meet the demands of the education curriculum.

The six months course was well designed. Jim McAuley taught colonial administration, although I was never able to find out his qualifications for this responsibility. He was a

poet of some standing who was to become Professor of Literature at the University of Tasmania where he died of cancer at a young age. Bill Conroy, a senior officer with the Department of Agriculture, made us familiar with the animal and vegetable life of the country, as well as its geography. Bill later became Director of Agriculture, remaining a colleague and friend for many years. David Fenbury, fresh from a two year stint with the British Colonial Office and colonies in Africa, taught us Pidgin. He returned to Papua New Guinea to establish the first Local Government Councils, later to become an important tier of government. He then served with the Australian contingent to the Trusteeship Council of the United Nations for two years. After several years as head of the Administrator's Department, he trod on a corn or two and was demoted to become Director of a ragbag Department, Social Development, and the Department in which I finally finished my career in Papua New Guinea.

The story of Conlon's departure from the School is told in Kerr's autobiography:

"In the end, McCauley led a revolt six weeks or so after Conlon took over. The Registrar rang me in my chambers, said there was a grave crisis at the school, and asked me to go over. And he meant a crisis, there and then. The staff had had a meeting and had decided that unless Conlon left the School that day they would take some action - I do not think it was actually expressed in the language of a strike; but in reality there was a real risk of teaching ceasing. McCauley had delivered Conlon an ultimatum, and the Registrar said Conlon had locked himself in his room and was in a state of profound depression. That day at the School he let me in to see him and I said, "What's it all about, Alf?" "Oh", he said, "they just don't want me". And I said, "You really shouldn't be here, Alf. I think you should go back and finish your medicine". He said, "I don't want to be thrown out, and I think they mean it. They just won't teach tomorrow". He suggested he be given six weeks to find a means of rationalising why he was going.

"The tension among the staff was so great it was doubtful whether they would agree to six weeks. I went out to the others and held some negotiations with McCauley. As I remember it, McCauley said, "Well John, he's got to go, physically, now. As far as we're concerned it can appear publicly for six weeks that he's still Principal but he must not come into the place - he must stay away". So something along these lines was worked out and Conlon accepted it".

Despite all this drama the School continued to carry out its functions. I was aware of midnight meetings and tensions but these were never allowed to intrude into the teaching programme. This part of my life was of great significance as many of the young people at the School would later hold senior posts and most remained friends. Of the 14 officers completing the Diploma course, 12 would return to New Guinea where one went on to become Director of Lands whilst one of the Forestry students also headed up his Department. For the next twenty-four years these people would be members of the one team. ASOPA itself figured a lot, as the new Principal, Charles Rowley, invited me to lecture at the school on two occasions. He later held a Chair at the University of Papua New Guinea. I also attended a Senior Officers Course, along with a number of Departmental Heads and other top brass.

I found Jim McCauley a distant figure, who always gave me the impression he was engaged in something distasteful. His lectures on government are now lost in the mists of time, but must have been based on theory as he had no experience in administration,

colonial or otherwise. Born in 1917, he was only two years older than me, had graduated with an M.A. from Sydney University after matriculation at Fort Street High School - Conlon and Kerr's old campus! He then spent four years as a teacher until captured by Alf for his 'think tank'. Jim gained a great deal of notoriety for his part in what became known as the 'Angry Penguins Affair' in 1949, when he and another young poet, Harold Stewart, deceived Max Harris, the editor of this new literary journal, by submitting poems attributed to one Ern Malley. Harris published the poems, allegedly discovered by Malley's sister, but in reality, the work of Stewart and McCauley. They had set out, it was revealed later, to construct "a poetic nonsense" and pass it off on the unsuspecting Harris, thereby striking a blow for conventional writing and debunking Harris's cultivation of the *avant garde*.

The outcry that followed their confession is now history (although a book was recently published detailing the 'Malley Affair') but one event is worth recalling. The police stepped in and prosecuted Harris for publishing "indecent, immoral, or obscene" material because, among other things, one of the poems referred to a couple entering a park at night. "People who go into parks at night go there for immoral purposes" argued the police. Harris was convicted and fined. Some years later 'Angry Penguins' went out of business and Harris established the Mary Martin chain of bookshops from which many of the books in the collection were bought. The chain, alas, did not survive, and the last of Mary Martin clings to life in Melbourne.

Strangely enough, my first oblique contact with colonial administration was made in early Y.M.C.A. days when I met Kel Crocker, a young stock and station trainee, who boarded at the Y in Peterborough, and whose home was a farm about thirty miles from that town. His father, a delightful old man with a flowing white beard, would lunch with us on market days when we usually killed a turkey. I was invited to their home on one occasion when I learned that Kel's brother was serving with the British Colonial Service in Africa. Walter Crocker became one of the world's experts in this field, as well as the author of several books which were standard texts for McCauley's course. He later served as Deputy Governor of South Australia. Although I never met him, we were always aware that Kel's brother was an exciting sort of person doing grand things in far-off lands. It is a pity his sort of experience was not available to us at ASOPA, although Paul Hasluck (who died as I wrote these pages) consistently maintained we had nothing to learn from African experience. We were to be, as he put it, "aggressively Australian" - whatever that meant.

Our lecturers included a doctor from the School of Tropical Medicine at Sydney University who gave periodical talks on the disease pattern of the tropics. The Diploma course was taught law by Hal Wootten, now a Judge of the New South Wales Supreme Court. Ida Leeson presided over a handsome collection in the

Library, which seemed to have a generous budget. She sported a mannish haircut, making it easy to understand the difficulty troops would have when she was in uniform. Behind her desk, with a major's crown, she could have passed as a man in any light. She was, however, competent and helpful, as befits an ex-Mitchell Librarian.

One of the more unusual members of my immediate group, an intelligent Scot, had been with the 14th Army in Burma where he served with a Scottish Regiment for the whole of the campaign in that country, rising to the rank of Major. We became firm friends and

shared many a session at local watering holes. He told me of his experiences at the War Office in London where he was posted at the end of the war. With the rank of Acting Lieutenant-Colonel, he was put in charge of a requisitioning section where he found requests on file for cannon balls! Doug Lightbody held an M.A. from Edinburgh University, as well as a teaching Diploma, and was sharp as a tack. He died rather tragically some years later when he choked on a piece of meat at a ball held in Port Moresby. Doug introduced me to a book *Boys will be Boys*, by E.S. Turner, which takes a light-hearted look at boy's magazines down the years. It took me over forty years to track the book down, including ferreting out a battered copy held at the Australian National Library. Eventually, I discovered my brother-in-law had one in his collection which he obligingly gave to me.

But it was Camilla Wedgwood who turned out to be another of those special people destined to play a big part in my life. She encouraged me to read widely in the field of community development, particularly in Asia and Africa, providing ample source material for my final essay in which I projected possible undertakings in Papua New Guinea. A couple of years ago, two staff members of Deakin University produced a biography of this fine lady but failed to capture her greatness. She came from a family who had married into the Darwin tribe and produced a long line of brainy offshoots. Her cousins included Aldous and Julian Huxley, the latter becoming first Director-General of UNESCO, whilst Aldous wrote brilliant novels and experimented with drugs. His most famous book is, of course, "Brave New World". She left a great gap in many lives when she died in 1955, at the age of 51, from lung cancer. I will always remember her chuckle when she told us of her joy in advising various shopkeepers the correct spelling of her family name. Many included an "e", and when they argued she would draw herself up, and say in her haughtiest voice, "Young man I AM a Wedgwood". I tried the same trick on an hotel keeper in Wales - not the haughty bit - but, rather, pointing out that his main lounge was advertised in foot high letters as "The Wedgewood Room". However, he disputed my spelling and no doubt the sign remains unchanged to this day.

Malinowski's books were required reading - his forced stay in the Trobriand Islands resulted in several works of very high standard. There are those who argue that some of his theories are suspect, particularly those dealing with the sexual lives of the people. Apparently the free and easy ways of these delightful people persist to this day as Theroux points out in his book, *The Happy Isles of Oceania*. As far as I can see, Paul wasn't very happy in many of the Pacific Islands he visited, with the exception of the Trobriands and Hawaii. He took Malinowski's books with him on his travels and pays particular tribute to his *Argonauts of the Pacific*, which explores the great trading voyages made by quite primitive people long before sophisticated navigational aids were available.

Another prescribed text came from the pen of Bill Groves - *Native Education and Culture Contact in New Guinea - A Scientific Approach*, which Camilla considered a sound approach to a pedagogical philosophy for Papua New Guinea. Bill argued it was possible, through education, to blend the best of both cultures, thus producing a being at peace with the world. As I became more familiar with Papua New Guinea, the fallacy of this thesis became evident. The British and the French were blatant in their use of education as an imperial tool, whereas Australia's endeavours to produce an amalgam

were frustrated by the people's insistence on an imperial-type curriculum. While not wanting us to re-create Australia *outré mer* they made it clear we should be purveyors of the essentials of Western education, not embellishers of indigenous culture. It is ironical that our bad habits were accepted without demur - any good ones, (however modest), were slower to take the graft.

Before we left ASOPA we were given intensive training in the use of visual aids in literacy and other adult education programmes, as well as in the classroom. Flannel graphs, epidiscopes, 16mm projectors, cartoons, etc, were to become familiar tools in the years ahead. Those attending the Diploma Course were taught how to maintain a range of mechanical equipment, including generators, battery chargers, together with a variety of petrol and diesel engines, to help them in their sometimes completely isolated work. On the whole, it was a marvellous experience. The small element of farce does not detract from the very real contribution ASOPA made to Papua New Guinea and is still making in its new role as an internationally oriented college to help overseas students. Alf Conlon went on to achieve his medical degree, then specialised in, of all things, psychiatry. Kerr became Chief Justice of New South Wales and, later, Governor-General of Australia, a role that is still the subject of bitter controversy. The Fort Street trio are all dead now. But ASOPA must surely stand as a memorial to Conlon, who, despite his shortcomings, had the foresight to plan for Papua New Guinea long before it was freed from Japanese domination.

About the author

Reg Thomson was born in Victoria in 1919. He left school at thirteen to work in a series of jobs in rural Victoria; joined the YMCA and enlisted in the Australian Army in 1941. He served in the New Guinea and Borneo campaigns.

On return from war service he gained admission to the University of Adelaide under the Commonwealth Reconstruction Scheme. On completion of a Diploma in Social Science he joined the colonial administration in Papua New Guinea as a junior education officer. In preparation for his colonial service in early 1949 he was admitted to the Australian School of Pacific Administration (ASOPA) located in Sydney. His association with the school lasted for 24 years, both as a student and later as a sometime lecturer.

Later in 1949 he began his long career in Papua New Guinea, where he quickly climbed through the ranks to serve with distinction in a number of positions including Executive Officer for Social Development and Director of Child Welfare. He retired from the PNG administration in 1973. In 2000 he received recognition for his contribution in a 25th year of Independence award from the Government of PNG.

Early in his life Reg became an avid book collector. His book is a 'tale of a gentle madness', the story of a book collector thrown hither and thither by tumultuous events beyond his control. Surviving wartime injury and illness and dangerous journeys in post-war Papua New Guinea, books have always been a passion. "The human condition

is a constant theme, as it has been since man first learned to write - so he could record his debts. In my twilight years I still get greatest pleasure mining seams of literary gold."