

Jack Murphy Notes

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Orchestra:

Tom Ginnoth
Reg Hill
George Ayreton
Joe Morton
Tom Clarke
Alf Adams (better known as Peter or Bull Adams)
George Findlay
Bill Rule

People:

Mr Hogarth
Matron Breemar
Mr Hedger
Matron Briggs
Sam Dunne
Keith Davis
Leslie Lynch
Walter Landsell
Norman Rees
Mrs McVicar
Miss Collins
George Findlay
Jack Burns
Alf Adams
Alec Burns
Paul Edwards
Don Forbes
Reg Hill
Ted Large
Tilly Aston
Mr&Mrs Robinson
Rev Forrester
Rev James Mirams
Joe Morton
Claude Perko
Bill Casey
George Knott
Joe Foster
Harry Foster
John Cain
Alec Johnson
Dick Sutcliffe
Miss Bryan
Dave Palmer
Polly Bowen
Fred Sutcliffe
Winfield
Aaron Solomon (Solly)

Jack Burn
Albert Harris
Allo (Aloisius) Upton
Jim Murphy
David Palmer

JOHN MURPHY (Jack Murphy)

10 Dec, 1990

My recollections of the Institute go back to July 1917. I was at the age of 10 years, admitted to the school on St Kilda Road. And at that time the whole system of training, education and living was very much like a reformatory style of administration. The Superintendent was Mr Hogarth and Matron was Matron Breemar. They preceded Mr Hedger and Matron Briggs. I was a junior pupil of course along with numerous others and we occupied a cottage in the front garden. It was a weatherboard building but it was very nice and comfortable. There were two dormitories but only one was in use. There were eight beds in the dormitory that I occupied along with 6 or 7 other lads. I have their names here : Sam Dunne, Keith Davis, Leslie Lynch, Walter Lansdell, Norman Reese and the Cottage Mother was an Irish lady by the name of Mrs MacVickers. They tell me by those who could see her that she was a red headed Irish lady and a very austere type, used to haul us out of bed at 6 in the morning with a cane in her hand and waited at the bathroom door for us to engage in a cold shower, winter and summer and we were driven in more or less with a threat of a smack on the bottom with the cane. She was followed by a Miss Collins who was much more easy going, rather a free and easy type and one of the boys for instance who could see a fair bit, he noticed something sparkling on her dressing table which was adjoining the dormitory, and he jumped in and stole it. Something – a brooch, I can't be sure what it was, maybe a ring, and it was reported. He admitted to the theft. The Superintendent, Mr Hogarth came down one morning, with the cane in his hand, stripped the blankets off the bed and the boy and gave him a flogging and turned to the rest of us and said, Now this is what any of you can expect if you do the same thing. And that was the type of administration that prevailed over us young chaps in those early days. Mr Hogarth came from England to take up a position with a benevolent society at Bendigo. He later applied for the position at the Institute somewhere about the turn of the century I believe but he was in office until an epidemic of influenza in 1919 took him into the next world beyond. On notification of his passing the whole lot of us cheered with joy. He was a tyrant of a man and very difficult to get on with.

I'm told of a story, one of the older students who had left by the time I had come there, but I had met him on one occasion, a chappie who was a piano tuner too, lived at Shepparton. He was great at impersonating people. And he could impersonate Mr Hogarth absolutely perfectly I'm told. George Findlay and Jack Burns knew him quite well, they were a little bit older than I was. Anyway this fellow bailed up one of the blind boys and reprimanded him in the voice of Mr Hogarth. Of course the boy was all dismayed and so forth, apologised and so forth. Well about a week later or some time anyway, this boy was genuinely approached by Mr Hogarth and was pulled up about something and he thought it was the impersonating fellow again and he hopped in and jobbed the boss. So that's a story that we have had handed down to us through the years as a result of the type of atmosphere that we had to survive in as school pupils until Mr Stan Hedger took over in 1920.

The junior and senior boys consisted of Alf Adams, Jack Burne, Alec Burns, Sam Dunne, Paul Edwards, Don Forbes, George Findlay, Reg Hill, Walter Lansdill, Les Lynche, Norman Reese, Ted Larch, there were others ofcourse which I can't remember. There were 67 pupils at the institute when I went to the school. Now the teachers. Headmaster was Dobson, funny old chap, and he did little or no teaching, he

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was just a disciplinarian, keeping the children in order and marching them in and out of school. Tilly Aston was the chief teacher, she was a blind lady and a wonderful person, I was rather shy about that person, she was an authoritative type and inclined to be a little dictatorial but not overbearing. Tilly was a wonderful teacher and she had a very fine singing voice. She was the first blind person in Australia to get a diploma of Education.

(Allan Nuskey: John she wasn't the first blind teacher at the institute was she?)

JM: as far as I know she was,

(Allan Nuskey: wasn't there a fellow named Robinson, earlier on, who was blind, in the '90s)

JM: Robinson was the Principal, the first Superintendent was Robinson and his wife was matron. But that was in the days before the institute on St Kilda Road was built. There was a school for blind children in Commercial Road, South Yarra on the same side as the library. That School was only small. It was obvious to a Reverend Forrester, a Congregational Minister in Chapel Street, there was a little chapel at the St Kilda end of Chapel Street where it got its name from. He took a vital interest in the school and it was he that founded the institute on St Kilda Road. He also founded the Eye and Ear Hospital. His name was Rev James Mirams and the colleague of his, the Rev Forrester who was also a Congregational Minister, founded the Deaf and Dumb Institute on the High Street corner of St Kilda Road.

There's one thing I'd like to mention here the institute as we know it was built on a race course, a trotting club course. It's first title was School and Asylum for the Blind and became the RVIB in 1892, where as it was erected in 1865.

Well, coming back to the '20s. Stan Hedger applied for the vacancy left by the death of Mr Hogarth and he devoted his whole time to organizing the first big public appeal that as far as I recall, was the first ever conducted by the Institute. It was during that appeal that the girls and boys of the school were used for the full publicity purposes for raising money. The appeal ended with a fund of 50,000 pounds which was big money in those days but prior to that, the institute was absolutely bankrupt and the Prahran City Council was providing funds to keep the staff paid to look after things but the food and the conditions was down right disgraceful.

The dining room was an asphalt floor which was broken up, you could really catch your heel in holes and topple over. We were furnished with long bare board tables like forms, no tablecloth and very heavy crockery and so forth. And the food was something shocking. It was very much a matter of Irish Stew, composed of meat and vegetables that the shops couldn't sell at the end of the day, sent down to the Blind Institute for the kids. It was shocking. Anyway, Stan Hedger raised 50,000 pounds and we went off to the Christmas Holidays of 6 weeks at the end of 1921 and when we came back to school we were ushered into a dining room with a beautiful parketry floor and little tables for four with linen tablecloths and cut glass vases with flowers in and knives and forks instead of the clumsy tools of trade that we had been used to. And for a change we got bacon and eggs for breakfast and beautifully cooked porridge and that sort of thing. From that moment on, the children in school lived as though they were in an up-to-date hotel and he spared nothing for the school in any

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way what so ever and I'm quite convinced from what I learn about his attitude towards the school, that although he was a bachelor in those days he was fond of children. He was often seen to pick up a little toddler in the courtyard where the bell rings you know, and pick him up on his shoulders or her which ever it was, back into the nursery, never mind calling a staff member to do it, he would do that himself. I think that was a fine indication of the nature of the man himself. Although he generated a great deal of dislike because of his firmness and his style of administration, he was a capable person, entirely energetic, dynamic and in a sense dictatorial, he was an autocrat and a very egotistical person. But he was capable of very vast compassion where it was justified. On the opposite end of the scale, if you got into hots with Stan on anything that was controversial or with anything that he disapproved of, it was just bad luck for the opponent.

An example is:

There was trouble in the brush shop on one occasion. The representatives of the Brush Makers Union wanted Trades Hall to come down to do battle with Stan Hedger over conditions of work in the brush shop. He received them, there was 2 of them, he listened to them and he just said "get out of here, I'll do what I want to do. I'll stand over dead bodies to get what I want. It's got nothing to do with you, I run this place, not you". That was his style. He was a war-like individual on occasions and nothing would stop him. He was an aggressive type of individual in a battle like that. He'd use any tactics at all to win an argument by hook or by crook but on the other hand, if you had a good logical case and you presented it intelligently and decently without any abuse like some of them would go in complaining bitterly and criticizing and so forth, well Stan wouldn't tolerate criticism. So if you presented a case to Stan and he decided to go ahead with you, he was always generous. Generous to an extreme.

Blind Workers' Union in the 1930s. I don't know that this was the beginning, the Blind Workers' Union began much earlier than that but I came into BWU as a member in 1933. You asked me the other day about the debate about White Sticks in 1932 well I was away at the concert party that year. When I joined in 1933, the secretary was Joe Moreton. He was a trombone player in the orchestra, we had a good old orchestra in those days, not a jazz band. Joe was an aggressive and lively sort of a chap. He didn't get on with Stan Hedger and I believe the two hated each other like poison, that's according to Joe. I lasted in the Union until he resigned in 1935 but it might have been a few months later, but I took over from a chap called Claude Perko who was a matmaker in the matting department, he cleared off to Tasmania - I'm not sure under what circumstances but we never heard of him again, but there was some trouble about money matters, Union funds, and there was money missing but whether Claude had anything to do with that I don't know. But I was induced by Mr Bill Casey, who later became Welfare Officer to take on the job because he reckoned I'd do a reasonable job as secretary because I had the gift of the gab.

(Allan Nuskey: Tell me about George Nott then, wasn't he the first President of the Blind Workers' Union?)

No, well that was very much later, that goes into the 40s. The first President of the Union was Tom Clark a brush maker, a fine old chap with a big voice and he used to stand up to Hedger in a magnificent style and Stan Hedger had enormous respect for Tom. He never used any abusive language or criticism he used logic all the time and

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he had a fine style with him; a very impressive person. He was the President of the Union, apart from another chap, Fred Barkell (a brush maker). Barkell was an outspoken chap but he wasn't as diplomatic as Tom. But Tom eventually retired and the vice President (Barkell) took his place. Mrs Moreton, the wife of the first secretary, she remained as a minute secretary for years and years and the minutes were kept by her. It was a case of debates and arguments, principles and objectives the Union should aim at with the Institute.

(Allan Nuskey: How did Stan Hedger look upon the Union?)

Stan Hedger hated the Union, wanting to smash the Union if he could. He was intent on sole control of everybody and everything. He was a bottle neck in the place, nothing happened in the place without his knowledge or his approval. If you got his approval, well it was great, you were on top of the world but you daren't do anything without his knowing about it or acceding to it. In 1937 I was working as a mat making because there were no pianos to tune. I'd been trained as a piano tuner but there was a depression on and people wouldn't spend money on tuning their pianos. So I had to go and work in the factory at the Institute, just able to earn a meagre pittance. The conditions of employment were terrible. The bosses in the factory were just horrible, loud mouthed, filthy tongued individuals that were dominating blind people, I couldn't reproduce the type of language that used to be used against blind people when something went wrong with the weaving. I experienced it myself. The foreman was an ex-supervisor at Pentridge Gaol, where criminals were put onto hard labour making coconut matting which we had to make a living doing without being criminals but the foreman of the factory was treating us as if we were criminals. On one occasion a blind chap working a few looms away from me, and I knew him very well, he came into the factory a bit early before working and laid a whistle and a whip on the bosses table so when he walked in he saw the symbolism of it and he went up and down the looms with it, smacking it onto the upright posts of each loom and declaring, if I can catch the son of a bitch so that put this whip on my table I'll lay it across his back. This was the type of atmosphere that prevailed. He was such a tyrant that on one occasion the workers geared up against him in a deputation to Stan Hedger. Hedger received the deputation and called the boss of the factory in to hear what he had to say about the complaints of the workers. He was, of course, meek and mild in the presence of Stan Hedger, nothing but a boot licking type of, can't think of what we called them. Anyway he was most subservient. "Yes Mr Hedger, no Mr Hedger, I didn't say that Mr Hedger" it was all a case of subservience to the boss. His attitude changed very graphically after that because he knew that the blind wouldn't stand for that sort of behaviour. His name was Joe Foster. He had a brother Harry who was a far superior person to Joe. Harry was like a fox terrier and treated the blind reasonably well (*check annual reports for name of Harry or Joe Foster as the boss/foreman of the Factory*) Harry was absolutely extortionistically crook on blind people, the language towards them was shocking. He was like a barking fox terrier dog when he was abusing you. In 1937, I walked out, without any resignation to the institute. I was still secretary to the blind workers' union and I induced the Union to adopt the resolution, appointing me as organizing secretary of the Blind Workers' Union of Victoria with objectives of inducing the State Government to finance the institute without public appeals, for charitable donations on an adequate basis and with representation of the blind on the Board. Now that goes back to 1937 but I didn't get anywhere with it. I interviewed numerous politicians and induced the chap that became the premier, that's John Cain Senior and his deputy. They both went down to

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the institute and of course they rang beforehand to say they were coming and of course the whole place was fully prepared to receive them including Stan Hedger. He had a talk to them and everything I complained about was over ridden, and the politicians found almost nothing wrong. The conditions of blind people and how they worked under were not seen. They were taken to certain picked out people in each factory to talk to, more or less escorted, not by Stan, but by staff who knew who to take them to. People who would not line up with my version of conditions, pay and all the rest of it. Most of the work was not enough for a blind person to make a decent living, it was a meer pittance.

Piano tuning

I was trained in piano tuning in 1923, I did not like factory work and after putting in about 3 months time, working in the various factories here I chose piano tuning as an occupation. I left the factory and put in 2 years with Alec Johnston as an instructor on tuning and repairing and that took me to 1926.

(Allan N: Tell us about Alec Johnston, who was he?)

Alec was a very amiable chap and he and I got on wonderfully well. He was a first class musician as well as tuner. He played very well, I don't know that he was a concert performer. He was so interested in me that I used to go home with him to his home in Mordialloc of a weekend to see what he was doing in his own workshop, repairing pianos. He was a great technician, very innovative. The other pupils, one of them was Ted Large, Sam Dunne and Dick Sutcliffe. Ted wasn't a good tuner but the other two and particularly Dick were excellent. He turned out to be a fine musician. He wasn't in the original orchestra, I don't think he ever belonged to the old style orchestra he came in on what Stan Hedger wanted the orchestra to be converted to and that was the Jazz Band.

The teachers were Tilly Aston and Miss Bryan, Dave Palmer was the music director and Miss Polly Bowen was assistant music teacher when I was a student. She preceded Fred Sutcliffe as assistant music teacher. Winfield was gone when I came there but there was a room named after him. He was a music teacher and I think he was German.

(Allan N: what about Aaron Solomon? Solomon's Lane was named after him.)

I knew Aaron Solomon well, even though he was in the school long before me. I joined the AAB concert party in 1926, that was my first appointment after doing my piano tuning course. Aaron was a AAB concert performer, an old time comedy singer, played a musical saw, whistles, ochorina, bells, telling funny story and a real character. He was a totally blind white headed gentleman in 1929. When he was at school he made a practice of marching up and down the lane at the rear of the building for exercise and they called it after him. He used to take messages up to the shops for various people. Sol, as we called him, before he took up the position in the concert party he was a mendicant on the streets, cadging for a living and he was a wealthy man when he came into the concert party. Stan Hedger induced the council to pass by laws to stop begging on the streets so all that stopped. The Association took responsibility for a lot of the blind beggars and the older blind people that the institute didn't have any responsibility for. The institute was noted for its care and training of

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children and the employment of certain aged adults until the age of 48 then you were considered suitable for care by the Association for the Blind.

There were new initiatives introduced to the factory by the time I left. Packaging and assembly, putting together toys, or cereal boxes, food items like sugar.

(Allan N: what sort of material did you play in the old orchestra and when did you join it?)

Brass was Tom Ginnoth cornet, Reg Hill cornet, George Ayreton cornet, Joe Moreton trombone, Tom Clarke euphonium, Alf (Peter or Bull known as) Adams was drummer. He was a clever drummer with lots of gadgets and things like tom toms even a xylophone at one stage. George Findlay violin, Bill Rule, Jack Burn, Albert harris all violins, and the cello, Allo Upton. (Aloisius Upton) what a nice chap. Double Bass was a namesake of mine Jim Murphy. Conductor and pianist, David Palmer.

Employed as the first placement officer for the RVIB, finding operations that could be performed by blind workers.

Hedger's displacement (retired – official story) engineered out of the position of CEO, framed him and confronted him when he returned from Holland a convention on blind welfare, confronted with an unsavory accusation and retired to Menzies Creek. Jack rang him, publicity about his retirement and Jack didn't believe he should have been retired. 1950? SW Hedger wanted a court case but too much an expense (at least 4,000 pounds win or loose) Matron was the subject of the frame up. Never got to court, Stan very critical of lawyers. He departed 1950 eventually to Newport in Sydney, died at aged 86. Ken Bunn followed SW Hedger, who was ousted in '52 by board and transferred to RBS in Sydney, job advertised and Neville Acklom a public service and he was the secretary of the hospital and charities commission and oversaw the management of the institute. Management appointed him. Jack's opinion that SW went to the charities commission after his dismissal and Acklom gave him no support at all. Acklom was an absolute tragedy, didn't do anything that wasn't noted in the minutes of the board. The union started an action – strike 1956, all the employees went to the front gate and the media were called.