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In Some Far Distant Region ...

Queensland is the most decentralised State in Australia. No doubt, the strength of the Regions is dependent on the availability of resources, particularly water. The Commission's Regional activities have been a major contributor to the wellbeing of the rural sector and Regional centres over the years.

We are told that there are three types of people in the world – those who can count and those who can't. In the case of Water Resources, there are a different three categories – those who can't be persuaded to leave Brisbane, those who won't work in Brisbane for love or money and those (apparently a small minority) who are prepared to serve anywhere in the State, including Head Office.

A large number of Regional staff described a short term of service in Brisbane with distinct lack of affection. Ross Krebs described three years in Brisbane as about 34 months too long. Peter Gilbey decided that being able to see his new-born daughter only in the dark did not give him quality of life. Trevor Tuesley remembers his delight at his Charleville appointment as District Clerk. *It was such a relief because I was getting out of Brisbane. I've only ever been back to relieve.*¹

There are obvious advantages in living in the Regions – proximity to work, proximity to the clients, less bureaucratic red tape; and there are obvious disadvantages too – proximity to work, proximity to the clients, no opportunity to blame bureaucratic red tape.

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Hebel Hotel in south-western Queensland

The desirability of life in a Region obviously depends on the actual location and the individual's requirements. A fairly obvious trend is for younger officers to move to the smaller centres, but as their children reach high school and more particularly tertiary education age, to seek transfer to a larger Regional centre with better educational facilities. Nevertheless, there are officers who are quite content to stay in the smaller centres where they immerse themselves into the community and become part of it – a much more difficult achievement in a bigger pool.

It may not always be possible to control the degree of immersion. Craig Gordon, who was District Engineer in Mundubbera from 1989 to 1993, tells of receiving phone calls as early as 5.00 a.m. to 'catch him before he went out' and as late as midnight by which time the caller could be sure he'd have come home. Others like Dan Coutts at Gatton and Tom Wallwork at St George found never being able to get away from the clients – they were always at the shops, the clubs and even church – very wearing. Social circumstances could also become very tense when in the course of duty an officer, such as Frank van Schagen, found it necessary to take action against an irrigator for breaching his licence conditions, and then met him socially at the Club.

Talking of the St George Club, we must point out that while the Commission's activities brought prosperity and growth to the area in which they occurred, this was (like all change) not without its downside. Prior to the advent of the Irrigation Area, the St George Club was the natural habitat of the graziers. But the scheme brought the nouveau riche farmers who moved into the club and gradually took it over² and, besides, "the farmer and the cowman cain't be friends".

Paul Bell, Mayor of Emerald until 2000, is very proud of the growth of his town through mining and irrigated agriculture directly attributable to Fairbairn Dam. Nevertheless, he is aware that some residents regret the change from the quiet railway town of the 1960s. When a dam site was being investigated on the Comet River,

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some residents of Rolleston were opposed to development because they, like the residents of Emerald, would have to lock their doors.³

The Commission has always had a Regional and District structure, but it has varied to suit the needs of the day and the management philosophy. Like most organisations with a wide geographical spread, the Commission has had to struggle to achieve delivery of the action at the coal face – that is, to give the clients immediate access to departmental officers who can make things happen and the desire to maintain a consistent policy and content across the whole State – that is, centralised management. It is also apparent that District staff are likely to become ‘captured’ by their clients and reluctant to implement unpopular Head Office edicts.

In 1948, the Commission had District Offices only at Cairns, Winton, Theodore and St George. The western District Office was in Winton, under the District Engineer’s house. On a still day, you could hear the white ants chewing the house stumps. The local member, Gordon Devries, was Minister for Education. In the State election, he nearly lost his seat, having been outpolled in the Winton Division. In retaliation, he closed all the State Government offices in Winton except Main Roads and moved them to Longreach.⁴

By 1951–52, the District Offices were located at Mareeba, Clare, Rockhampton, Longreach (with a sub-district at Cloncurry), Theodore, Charleville, St George and Goondiwindi.⁵ Ken Carmichael established numerous offices to implement the *Farm*



District Clerks Conference ca 1974

(standing) Mick Williams, Bob Rivers, Warren Bridson, Jim Osbaldeston, Matt Cranitch, Jim Pasben, Glenn Poole, Bill Fossett, Jeff Abern, Dudley McIntosh, Lindsay Orchard (seated) Cec Kilvington, Robert Craig, Mick Hogan, Keith Hughes, Howard Bloomfield

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Water Supplies Assistance Act. He liked district officers. People could get to see them and they could economically get to the people. At various times, there have also been Regional or District Offices at Cairns, Townsville, Ayr, Mackay, Richmond, Hughenden, Winton, Emerald, Biloela, Mundubbera, Gympie, Nambour, Brisbane, Ipswich, Gatton, Toowoomba, Warwick and Roma.

Whilst Regional Offices have generally been managed by Engineers, District Offices have had a variety of managers, depending on the nature of the principal business at the time of appointment. District Offices have served as training grounds for young engineers, but at least as frequently an experienced officer from a different background has been appointed. The contributions of officers such as Des Foster at Warwick, Dennis Russell at Roma, Dave Coles at Gympie, Keith Perry Peddle at Theodore and Frank Skillington (Skillo from Billo) at Biloela should not be underestimated.

When Col Taggart came to Brisbane, he was *amazed to realise how little Head Office knew about the bush and how worried I was out there thinking, "Oh God, they'll realise I haven't done this," and when I got down here I realised they may not have known if I hadn't done anything for 12 years.*⁶

Before regionalisation, Commission staff used to report through their respective branches. *Even though we had a Regional Engineer, for project work we used to work directly through Brisbane. Any major changes or policies went through Brisbane. If we wanted money or anything, it was all done by memos. We were very cautious about using the phone as STD calls were expensive.*⁷ There were STD bars on the phones until the 1990s and all STD calls had to go through the switch girls who kept a manual record of every phone call made. Eventually it was decided this was tedious and staff could make their own calls to Brisbane but they were still restricted within the Region. Calls to Longreach or St George still had to go through the switch. People were very careful with money.⁸

Perhaps the most careful monitor of phones was Irishman Sam McCall, District Engineer at Longreach. He used to monitor the local phone calls in the office, believing that *if you couldn't trust people with local phone calls how could you trust them with long distance.*⁹

Commissioner Beattie decided to review the Regional boundaries and appointed Sam McCall, John Ward, Bill Day and Arthur Payne to a working group to make recommendations. They, in fact, did not reach agreement and submitted a majority and minority report. But both reports got it wrong. Both recommended a Regional Office in Townsville, but the correct answer was Ayr. Don had forgotten to tell them in advance.¹⁰

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Tom Fenwick *always had a very strong view that we had to build a significant level of regional management. I really did think that the Regions needed more delegated authority than they had had up to that time, and I continued to progress that. I've always seen these sorts of organisations as something with a centre that is about policy and standards and so on, and the regional people are about service delivery, and they have quite separate roles.*¹¹

The Regions set up under Tom's regime and their Regional Managers were: Far North, Bill Souter; North, Tim Smith; Central, Mike McKenna; Burnett, Adrian Muller; South East, Chris Robson; South, Frank van Schagen; West, John Palmer.¹² In 1989 Adrian Muller retired. The Commissioner decreed that all Regional Engineers should have a limited tenure in a Region and would be required to relocate at intervals. Bill Souter was relocated to Bundaberg, the only one ever subjected to this rule. Peter Gilbey succeeded him in Mareeba.

When the Commission was incorporated into DPI, applications were called for the new Regional Directors (of all DPI functions). Former water resources engineers Tim Smith and Frank van Schagen were appointed in South-East and South, but the other Regions appointed officers from other disciplines. Warren Hoey, Regional Manager West, went on to become Director-General of DPI. Shaun Coffey in Central Region became an Executive Director in DPI, Brisbane, and was succeeded in Rockhampton by Mike McKenna. The Regional Manager North, Stewart Wood, returned to Adelaide after the creation of the Department of Natural Resources.

The following pages provide a few snapshots of scenes in the region: at different times, from north to south and from east to west. As in the other chapters, it is intended to provide a flavour of regional life, rather than attempt the comprehensive coverage that would require a three-volume treatise.

Although the principal activities of the Mareeba District Office have been focused on the Irrigation Area, the office, particularly during the period when it was designated a Regional Office, had responsibility for a wide range of activities over a vast geographical area including Cape York Peninsula and the Gulf country. The activities include water resources assessment and management, licensing and investigations as well as operations. Mike Keane describes the work as *interesting and diverse*.

Engineer Henry Hannam was the Officer-in-Charge for many years. He was much respected for his dedication and attention to detail in an era when good management appeared to be derived from the military model. He did a remarkable job in fostering a wonderful team spirit in the biggest team outside Head Office, with diverse natures, roles and qualifications, serving a community of innumerable ethnic backgrounds.

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'New' crops such as tea trees in the Mareeba District

He was very much supported by his wife Lottie, who is still involved in a very active branch of the Water Resources Retired Officers Association.¹³

Subordinate staff were exuberant and there were many joyous occasions in Mareeba. Robin Black, who resigned from the Commission in the late 1960s to become a lecturer at the Queensland Institute of Technology, speaks with great enthusiasm of the work and life in Mareeba and the innovation in irrigation area design.¹⁴ Tom Fenwick remembers *Robin making some silly remarks to some character behind the bar in Cooktown, and we had to hightail it quick before we got into a fight.*¹⁵

There was always a strong engineering presence together with hydrographic and groundwater staff.¹⁶ Keith Turner was the principal surveyor for many years. An Englishman with a passion for model railways, Keith was always prepared to go the extra yards. For at least a time, he was known as 'Admiral Turner', according to Peter Cannell. *Keith Turner was an ex-Royal Navy man who came to Australia after the War. Keith had an old four-wheel drive, while working in the Dimbulah section of the Mareeba-Dimbulah Irrigation Area. One day it rained, and Keith was driving along with all these guys to make his regular crossing of Sandy Creek. He kept on driving without testing the depth of the water, and next thing everybody was sailing out of the vehicle. So he became 'Admiral Turner' after that, not Surveyor Turner.*¹⁷

Greg Chettle was the senior draftsman in Mareeba and was considered by John Clark as *probably the best draftsman the Commission has produced*. But tragedy struck one day when Greg and fellow draftsman Glen Holmes were involved in a collision with a timber truck and both were killed. John Clark, who moved to Mareeba to act in Greg's position, recalls seeing the blue Commission utility that was totally written off in the accident.¹⁸ Wayne Chettle, Greg's son, was also a draftsman with the Commission and he too was killed in a road accident.

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Following Henry Hannam's retirement, Peter Phillips acted as Regional Engineer until the position was filled. Shortly after, Peter joined the Co-Ordinator General's Department. The new Regional Engineer was John Potts, who remained in Mareeba until 1982 when he was succeeded by Bill Souter. Bill left for Bundaberg in 1990 and Peter Gilbey became Regional Engineer until the Region was incorporated into DPI's North Region and Peter transferred to Townsville.

Innisfail District Office was established in the late 1970s with Tim Smith the first District Engineer. It was established because of its proximity to the drainage schemes which were proposed to drain the swamps for increased sugar production. Unlike other areas where the Commission devoted a lot of effort to getting water to cane farms, in Innisfail the objective was to get the water away **from** farms.

Maurice Clewley was the first person to arrive at the office, having caught the train to Townsville and then a taxi to the office. *There was absolutely nothing there.* Maurice slept on the office floor that night. The next day Tim Smith arrived and they both became *involved in cranking up the Innisfail office.*¹⁹ They were joined by a surveyor and a draftsman and had to report to the Regional Engineer, John Potts, who was in Mareeba.

Maurice reports that Tim Smith was *excellent to work with*. He was good at receiving and giving advice and worked well in a team. Excellent relationships were formed in the office with the staff remaining good friends on the *social side as well as the work side.*²⁰

In the early stages the office was heavily involved in obtaining agreements for the drainage areas and their subsequent gazettal. The next challenge was draining the swamps. This involved detailed survey work, construction and negotiation with the land holders.

Amongst the surveyors²¹ was a character, Johnny Fong On – a small Chinese man. Maurice Clewley recalls *we thought he was probably over 80 but he was fitter than the rest of us. He used to do all the survey work for us around the swamps and sometimes the water in the swamps was deeper than he was tall. He used to employ a big strong chainman who used to carry him around on his back when he had to. He used to go outside and eat garlic all afternoon and come back in – he never got ill.*²²

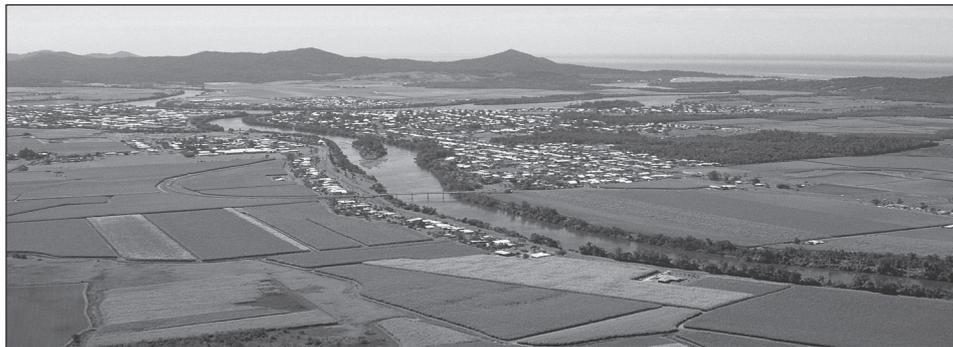
Mike McKenna moved from Charleville to replace Tim Smith in 1980. He recalls that on the first night he was there, they had more rain than they had had in three years at Charleville. His young children found it incomprehensible.

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Don Beattie remembers *at the beginning of 1981, seeing on the TV that in the 24 hours on the Saturday they'd about 24 inches of rain at Babinda, and prior to that every day in January there had been quite heavy rains. I looked at my wife and said, "I think I know where I'm going to be tomorrow." She said, "Where?" I said, "I think I'm going to be in Cairns." We went to Babinda the next day. On the Monday morning (Minister) Ken Tompkins and I were sailing round in a boat. Ken asked the fellow who was taking us round in the boat and said, "Where's your farm?" He said, "It's down there!"*²³

Mike McKenna's principal task was to put the plans into place as well as working through the processes of the establishment of a number of other drainage areas. Construction involved *putting massive excavators into pristine swamps. We dug through fish habitat reserves. We annihilated all sorts of orchids and wonderful things, and I suppose in hindsight one shudders at what we did at that stage, but the pressure was on for additional land. The cane industry was growing cane below high tide mark, it was growing it on the side of the Great Divide, and there was significant pressure for additional lands. We did a lot of work with the sugar industry, but I don't think that we got much recognition for the sort of work that we did.*²⁴

*The pressure for additional land was so great that it got to a point with the sugarcane expansion of the 1980s that Don Beattie asked the sugar industry to allow us to have some involvement in selecting the land for cane expansion. That's where we really got off-side with the cane industry, because we recommended against most of the recommendations that they put forward, because they were so marginal. Don Beattie gave us a great degree of support, and in fact most of the recommendations that came forward from the committees were eventually knocked back, and that put a bit of a chasm between us and the industry for a period of time.*²⁵



Johnston River at Innisfail

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*However, life went on and we had a lot of other things to do. As the cane area was expanding, so were bananas, and we had resource management issues to deal with, with people becoming more aware of irrigation, even in the wet North. I became heavily involved with the River Improvement Trust movement and was Chairman of the Cardwell Trust for the period I was in Innisfail. I certainly attended all the meetings of the Mulgrave and Johnston Trusts.*²⁶

As District Engineer, Mike McKenna found his days were full. When very heavy rain damaged crops, the Commission was seen as an avenue of relief. The working day started at 6.00 a.m. and *they would still ring at 7 or 8 o'clock at night.*²⁷

The multicultural nature of Innisfail made the place an interesting one to work in. There were Italians, Maltese, Greeks and Yugoslavs amongst others. All the *different nationalities caused some communication difficulties at times.* Mike Keane remembers *visiting drainage board members with an old farmer and they'd all start speaking in Italian because he had only ever spoken Italian (they were very polite to the old people) and I'd be sitting there wondering what was going on. Even on the River Trust, they got the local engineer in and he was Italian and they were all speaking Italian.*

*There were plenty of blues – some were pretty volatile people.*²⁸ Some of the feuds were long standing. Neighbours Anderson and Reghenzani had been at loggerheads since the 1950s when the debate over drainage or whatever had started in Gordonvale. When Mike McKenna started in Innisfail in 1980, Mr Anderson *printed his (Mike's) name in the Cairns Post at least 30 times,* wanting him to do something about his neighbour. The feud continues today.²⁹

One solution at public meetings was to meet the aggression head on. This was certainly the approach taken by consulting engineer Geoff Nolan. He had written a flood study of the Tully River. The problem for Innisfail is that it is a big floodplain and you can't make the channel any bigger. The channel cannot cope with the rainfall and so the *water has to go across the land, simple as that. The country has to flood, that's what it's designed for.* The people of Innisfail *wanted a magic solution and Geoff copped it the first time, copped it for five minutes and then got on the attack. All the other groups came back and criticised his report because he was going to put channels through people's farms and put levee banks on them and it wasn't going to solve the whole problem. He was very impressive. Before they even walked in the door, he'd say, "You're a very stupid man – you built a farm in a flood plain."*³⁰

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Others believed at meetings it was very important not to *put anybody off-side*. *There were always local groups and ethnic groups and different pasts and relationships and you never know what they are. They might appear to be friends or they might not be. You are the outsider*. Mike Keane remembers when he came to Innisfail he was different – *I looked different, I dressed differently. I had been a city person and they all walked around barefoot in their old King Gees to go shopping on a Saturday morning*.³¹

Mike, like others, realised that the success or failure of a drainage scheme depended on the people, and only 10% was dependent on the technical elements. *We wanted 80% acceptance of a scheme to make it work. If you put people off-side, they stay off-side forever. And they get mad and they get drunk and they ring you up and abuse you*.³² Mike believes the people issues are the difficult ones. *You have to work out a rating that reflects the degree of benefit from a scheme. It's not the money, it's just that they don't want to be taken down. They all live in a community and they don't want to drive past somebody's place and say, "that guy conned me" for the next 30 years. It's about honour*.³³

However, generally the *Italians were really very good to deal with. Most Italians are very enterprising and they have a very good sense of honour*.³⁴

Maurice Clewley enjoyed the social life. *Firm friendships were formed between Commission staff and the locals. Some of the families became our best friends. We organised fishing trips up to the gulf or out to the reef. We went and worked on cane farms at weekends for some exercise and something different to do*.³⁵

Townsville has variously been a regional and district centre. Following a stint in the Burdekin, Stan 'Curly' James became Regional Engineer for a number of years. Stan did not view his period in Townsville as the highlight of his career, preferring the work arrangements of construction and the domestic arrangements of Brisbane.³⁶

Bill Souter, recruited by Harry Hiley from Victoria, commenced his career with the Commission in Townsville,³⁷ working principally in the Farm Advisory area. *When Bob Kimber was on leave from the Burdekin, I relieved him. I was taught barra fishing by Eddie Bukbardis who also showed me my first crocodile*.³⁸

The day Ian Kulpa started, he arrived immaculately dressed, not realising the country code. He was taken in hand by Bob Fell and taught.³⁹ The office was at the top of the stairs and visitors could turn right or left. About every half hour someone would stagger in and say, "Is this where they sell the tickets to Palm Island, boss?"⁴⁰

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Stan James was generally considered a good, if somewhat idiosyncratic, leader who allowed junior staff to take on more responsibilities. Mike McKenna was given the opportunity to design the irrigation system for the (old) Burdekin Scheme, converting the system for sugar, rather than tobacco farms.⁴¹ The land parcels for the new industry were increased from 40 acres to 70 acres and everything had to be adjusted.

In 1979 Stan transferred to Operations Branch in Brisbane and Jim Ole became Regional Engineer. He too was a good leader, albeit a different style from Stan. He was respected and liked by Mike McKenna and together they enjoyed six beers every afternoon on their way home.⁴²

Before very long, the review of regional boundaries had been conducted and it was decided that the Regional Office should be located in Ayr. Jim Ole transferred to the new location, taking the majority of the staff with him. Following Jim's tragic accident, Tim Smith became Regional Engineer in Ayr until the DPI amalgamation resulted in Townsville again becoming the Regional Office. Peter Gilbey became the senior Commission man in the Regional office under Stewart Wood.

The Commission has had a presence in the Burdekin area for many years, as the Inkerman scheme was the first it ever built. Over the years, it has had a number of offices in a number of locations. Ayr has also been the Regional Office for North Region. The area has therefore seen enormous change in technology, operation and personnel. Some of this change is documented in other chapters.

Parts of the district, comprising Dalbeg, Millaroo and Clare, began as a soldier settlement, the settlers predominantly Australians and English. However, with the rise and fall of tobacco, many went bankrupt or walked off the land. Many Italian migrants and displaced persons migrated to these areas after World War II. Many had a natural talent for farming. They knew how to live meagrely and they managed to survive. Many stayed in the district for many years, often several generations.⁴³ Sugar gradually replaced tobacco as the principal crop, leading to problems for the operators as the system was not designed to distribute the peak water requirements of cane. Initially, most of the 70 acre farms grew 10 to 15 acres of tobacco and the rest of the land would have been used for something else. Later the farms were under 95% cultivation with sugar. The systems were all manual and the officers spent a lot more time on the systems



Ayr Office under construction 1983

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just making sure they could deliver water to the customers. There were also a few customers who would avail themselves of water without wishing to pay for it.⁴⁴

Ross Wheeler, a second generation Commission employee remembers Clare as a child as his father, Eric, joined IWSC in Clare in 1952. Eric left for Dalbeg in 1956, returning to Clare from 1958 until 1963–64. He was a *pretty straightforward sort of a bloke and took a lot of pride in what he did*. While Ross was young, he and his siblings used to travel round the channels in Clare in the side cart of his father's BSA motorbike.⁴⁵

Much of the office's work was involved in collecting water rates from the farmers. The job of the water officer was not always popular with the local community. However, Eric Wheeler does not recall any trouble with the farmers even though the water officers were *made the scapegoats*.⁴⁶

From 1960 until 1966, Stan James was District Engineer at Clare. The district extended from Tully to north of Mackay and Stan was involved with everything, including construction, and seemingly everyone. He became *a bit of a nomad, wandering all round the district from Mt Isa, Clare, Ingham, down to Bowen* and his wife, Joyce, wondered where he was at times. But he always came home for Friday night, *because we had the open-air theatre. You took your cars along and there was a screen up on the wall of the old community hall. Everyone went along, all the farmers and the Commission people, and we had a great time*.

The social life was great. Stan James *learnt to play bocce bowls, played tennis and cricket at weekends and did a little work in between*. Many of the farmers of the Burdekin were ex-servicemen, certainly in Clare and much of Millaroo. *There*



Premier Job Bjelke-Petersen opening the Ayr office 1983

*was a kinship with people like that. It was a pretty mighty thing, what they did, and we all respected it.*⁴⁷ Although not an early riser, Stan James joined in the Anzac Parade and dawn service. It was a great day, lasting all day. *They were very sociable people, but very cranky people if you get on the wrong side of them, too. In many instances they were against the Commission because we had the controlling hand. Not everything we did was quite right, according to them. I do believe we tried to do the best we could for them. It was for them, not for anyone else.*⁴⁸

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From the 1980s, the Burdekin was administered out of the Ayr Regional office, which also managed the design and construction of the BRIA.

Mackay, situated on the Pioneer River, is the centre of a cane growing area. Originally, as with most cane areas, the district relied on rainfall, but as the economics of farming became tighter, the benefits of irrigation became clearer.

Ian 'Charlie' Chalmers served a term as District Engineer, concentrating on farm advisory and licensing activities. In 1971 Doug Flanders replaced him. Doug recalls *the whole year I was there it rained, there wasn't one drop of irrigation water needed*. His main activity was the Denison Creek dam site investigation. The development of the Bowen Basin coal reserves was in full swing and ways of providing water were being urgently investigated. *We dug holes in the river bed, which you probably couldn't do today. We had to find a temporary water supply also, so I worked with Bruce Pearce on groundwater investigations to look at Braeside borefield. I had a few arguments with Bruce about where to drill. I had some vocational experience of investigation work in Victoria about groundwater and I had this idea that it would be the same throughout Australia. I looked at aerial photos and determined the spots but Bruce disagreed. I shifted the drillers one weekend when Bruce wasn't there and we found some water. Bill Day rang me up and asked me what was going on. Bruce didn't come back again. I was sorry because he was a good bloke but he kept picking areas where there wasn't any water. They have had a good supply there from the borefield the Commission developed.*⁴⁹

Doug left Mackay to undertake consultancy work in the Indian sub-continent and was replaced by Rob Robson. Gary Luck saw a job advertised for a cadet draftsman in Mackay and applied. *At the interview, Stewie Robinson had my application in front of him, with a lot of red squiggles on it – I didn't know whether they were spelling errors or not – but my main memory is that he had his hand in his pocket shaking coins all the time.*⁵⁰

Gary got the job and arrived with a letter for the District Engineer, but he wasn't there. Nor was the draftsman in charge, Bob McDonald. So there was no induction or anything like that. Four weeks later Rob Robson came around to introduce visiting Jim Ole to the staff. He came upon Wayne Reinke and Gary Luck, who had been working there for four weeks, and he said, "And this is – I don't know your name!"⁵¹

According to Gary Luck, Robson's main interest appeared to be restoring antique cars, rather than actually working for Water Resources. He also had a habit of arriving late for the Friday afternoon drinks and leaving early. He resigned as District Engineer in 1977 and was succeeded by Rob McAllister.

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Gary Luck's main memory of him (McAllister) is of a tall, gawky engineer. At this stage there was rivalry, or competitive team work, between the engineers and draftsmen. Once a fortnight during summer we'd have an office barbecue, with the engineers-versus-draftsmen darts match. Rob McAllister was a right-handed writer, but he used to throw his darts left-handed with the wrong foot forward, and every time he'd throw a dart, he'd almost fall over. He could hardly hit the board, but he insisted on playing every time, which the draftsmen really liked, because we'd always beat the engineers when he was playing! He was a great asset to our team.⁵²

When Rob McAllister resigned in 1981, Mike McKenna was appointed. He was there for five years probably five of the best years, because of a number of things – the job, the people and the fishing.⁵³ He was responsible for the administration systems that existed, significant areas of groundwater, the debates over surface water and farmers' rights and hydrography. He worked with Graeme Allan and others, supervised Kinchant Dam and developed the Eton Scheme. When Mike went to Mackay there was about 8 kilometres of channel, and when I left we'd completed Oakenden Main Channel and two of the pipeline reticulation systems that hang off the very end.⁵⁴

The office was primarily concerned with design. Peter Noonan and Allan Murray were the key designers and Bob McDonald was the senior draftsman, and if you look back on that team, we didn't have much chance but to succeed.⁵⁵

Perceiving that Kinchant Dam may have been the last of the big construction jobs, Mike McKenna, John Potts and Malcolm Pegg worked towards moving staff from construction to operations. Some of the guys came across . . . and I think they were happy to do that, and I think happy with the final outcome. It also provided the opportunity for Malcolm to reduce the construction workforce, but still maintain the talent base within the organisation.⁵⁶

When Mike McKenna left Mackay there was water coming out of travelling irrigators and flowing down furrows. I suppose we were rather satisfied with the commitment that we put in. I can always remember working overtime, and when I went to Mackay I gained what is equivalent to PO4 status. We used to work overtime quite a lot, and all the guys in the office would get paid overtime and I wouldn't, because I was over and above the level. Anyway, I think we achieved what we expected to achieve at the end of the day.⁵⁷

While in Mackay I was Chairman of the Proserpine Shire River Improvement Trust, heavily involved in litigation actions up there relating to the Trust works. I was involved in the very first investigations and in fact resumption actions that took place for the Proserpine Dam. I was with Don Beattie and (Minister) Goleby

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*during many public discussions we had on Proserpine (Peter Faust) Dam, and was certainly around when the time came for the Government to make the decision to build that dam. I was part of that, and when I look back on that, I often think that Proserpine would never have survived without that structure, both from the point of view of water resource need, and also the flood mitigation perspective.*⁵⁸

During Mike McKenna's time, Mackay District Engineer reported to no-one in a region. As a result of the restructuring of the regions, it was resolved that the office would report to Ayr. Thus the new District Engineer, John Palmer, answered to Peter Gilbey. This was later changed again, and Mackay became part of Central Region with John Palmer answering to none other than Mike McKenna, who by then was Regional Service Director.

Although Rockhampton is the obvious 'capital' of Central Queensland, there was no regional office there until 1965. There was, however, a District Office in Rockhampton in 1950 with Eric 'Robbie' Robinson in charge.

After spending a year in Biloela, Malcolm Pegg was given the task of setting up a Regional Office in Rockhampton. Once this task had been achieved, the position of Regional Engineer was advertised. Malcolm applied, but the appointment was given to Sam McCall, the senior applicant. Ironically, when Sam moved to Brisbane in 1972, Malcolm again applied for the position but Alan Taylor was not prepared to release him.⁵⁹

Sam McCall had been District Engineer at Longreach before his transfer. Sam was an Irishman who had played Rugby for his former country. Although he changed his allegiance, he never changed his accent. His brogue was not easy for the untutored ear to decipher. Nevertheless he was considered a good engineer and a good leader. On his retirement in Brisbane, he noted in his farewell speech that he had left a number of jobs in his lifetime, looking forward to his next destination. He was not as confident about the only change lying before him.⁶⁰

The man appointed to the job was the legendary John 'The Trump' Moreton. Among his first actions as the new Regional Engineer was to move his desk out of an office to share the open area plan with the staff. Before too long, work had virtually come to a standstill so he moved back into the office and work resumed. Obviously offices not only serve the purpose of isolating the boss from incessant staff interruptions, they protect the staff from perceptions of 'big brother is watching'.

Central Region covers a wide area and includes District Offices at Biloela, Theodore and Emerald, all of which manage Irrigation Areas. The water business in and around Rockhampton itself is comparatively minor. It is important for regional officers to

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*Rockhampton staff at a 1984 First Aid course at which 'Trump Junior' was the tutor
(Back row) John Moreton, Susan Kane, Greg Murphy, Kel Roberts, Kelly Brettell, Mick Williams, David Smith, Jeff Lloyd
(Front row) Noel Hoare, Selwyn Peters, Roger Porteous, Alan 'Cherry Picker' Egan, Andrew Moreton*

travel around the country getting to know it because they are *expected to know what is happening in every nook and cranny. Even locally, people ask what's going on and senior management and people ring up from Head Office or Indooroopilly and ask where are the silty patches in central Queensland and you are expected to know these things.*⁶¹

Rockhampton was (and remains) a very friendly office, particularly in the days when the staff all shared the same floor in Quay Street (Suncorp was downstairs). The only physical divisions on the floor were an office for the District Engineer and an interview room. The only dividers were between the sections such as hydrology and stream control. If you wanted to see someone you could stand up, look over the partitions to see if they were there and then go over.⁶² It was a friendly office with social functions, Christmas parties and Friday drinks part of the social ritual. In 'The Trump's' time, it was recognised that Friday afternoon was not a fruitful time to telephone the Regional Engineer.

Norm White was the supervising draftsman but *he could step into anybody's job cause he'd been here for ages and knew the work backwards. He was exacting to work with but had the softest heart you could imagine.*⁶³ Mick Merrin served on the drafting staff before moving north and then to Western Australia before returning to provide valuable assistance to Mike McKenna.⁶⁴

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More Rockhampton staff of 1984

(Back row) John Moreton, Maurie Watts, Ian Moran, Alec Marshall, Tony Bucknell, Carol 'Polly' Wolski, Robyn Martin, unidentified officer, Peter Taylor (Front row) Billy Robertson, Bob Sykes, Merv Leslie, Bill Mead, Bob Sorenson, Ron 'Rowdy' Guppy, Andrew Moreton

In 1989, John Moreton announced his retirement. Although he believed he had *anointed his successor*; due process was followed. Richard Priman acted in the position pending a permanent appointment, leading to 'The Trump', in his inimitable fashion, announcing that he had been *replaced by a pieman*.⁶⁵ The permanent appointment was Mike McKenna. In later days, under DPI, Mike became Regional Service Director and, under DNR, Executive Director Regional Service Board. Mike, as has already been seen, is an incredibly hard worker, driving himself from the small hours to the small hours. While as a drinker he has neither the capacity nor the reputation of 'The Trump', he is no mean performer and is renowned for his postponement of an evening meal when in the provinces. An addicted fisherman, his ambition is to lower the Pacific Ocean by six inches by removing enough fish.⁶⁶

Biloela District Office was established principally to manage the Callide Valley Irrigation area. The area, although comparatively small, produces a range of crops from lucerne to cotton, originally using groundwater. When Callide Dam was constructed, additional water became available to the Valley and rules were developed for its distribution. Some water was released to Callide Creek to recharge aquifers or to supplement groundwater. In addition, channels were constructed to divert water to recharge weirs on Kariboe and Kroombit Creeks. Although a detailed analysis of the groundwater system was undertaken in the early 1970s by Col Hazel and others, subsequent experience showed that the allocations exceeded the available water supplies.

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Frank Skillington was Officer-in-Charge for many years. Most of the technical staff were concerned with groundwater.⁶⁷ Their relations with the landholders were of mixed quality, as there was a general resistance to any payment for water and a reluctance to have bores metered, even for investigation purposes. On a number of occasions, some of the meters, for no apparent reason, rose up and made heavy contact with the back of axe-heads, to the detriment of the errant meters.

Biloela gained its first District Engineer, Maurice Clewley circa 1976. Stage Two of Callide Dam was under construction and as District Engineer he assumed responsibility for this project. This he regarded as a challenge as he *badn't done much operational stuff before*.⁶⁸ The District engineer had a very small office in terms of the operational side. The office staff comprised the engineer, an office girl, the groundwater adviser, boring inspector and, later on, another administrative person.⁶⁹

Before Maurie's arrival, work at Biloela had been undertaken by boring supervisors, Doug Neilson, for whom he has a lot of respect, and Morry Dennis. Morry resigned from the Commission but Clewley and others convinced him *to come back and work with us as a contractor. He was one of the real oldtimers who knew everything with regards to groundwater and locality cause he'd been there so long and the locals loved him*. Now aged about 85, he's still in Biloela doing some sort of development.⁷⁰

As far as Maurice is concerned, the town of Biloela was friendly. Two power stations were under construction, so the place was *full of these itinerants*. There were probably 1,000 itinerant workers and a population of 4,000-5,000. Commission staff were *just another one of these itinerants*. The locals were dependent on itinerants for sport and other activities and *we were accepted straight out. The itinerants were always looking for things to do whereas the locals were not necessarily. Everywhere you went there was a whole variety of people and you had a really great time. We enjoyed the social side. We just loved it*.⁷¹

Theodore was a Commission town, created in the 1920s by Premier Ted Theodore as a model irrigation scheme. According to Len Redmond, *it had no Shire Council and nothing in the way of local government. This meant that everything fell to the Commission – roads, social services, power, water, facilities, sewerage (which they didn't have)*. The District Engineer had to fulfil most local government responsibilities. Len, who was District Engineer between 1952 and 1960, was aware of wearing many different hats. *When you had to sign anything, you were the engineer, the contractor, the Mayor, the lot. The Lands Department officer had to sign about three times and I had to sign the rest. But they never paid me their salaries! We had to run things like the cemetery and the pub. All the Shire accounts used to arrive at the Irrigation Office*.⁷²

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Many tasks, well beyond his job description, fell to the District Engineer. As unofficial mayor, he had to take the oath of allegiance at naturalisation ceremonies and crown the local Queens. *Every man has his limits. Bill Bromfield (Len's predecessor) said he could put up with most things, but kissing babies was beyond the call of duty.* At the local debutante ball, the 'Mayor' had to do the Pride of Erin with the Debs. Len Redmond found this rather trying as he was not a dancer. His wife, Cec, confided that *Len used to slip back to the pub for a drink and one of the young lasses said to me, "Where's your Daddy gone?"*⁷³

Len's limit was burials. *There were no facilities in town for keeping dead bodies and you can't dig the grave before somebody dies. A lot of people had bought plots in the cemetery, but even if you knew someone was in hospital, you couldn't start the digging. Since you knew you couldn't keep a body (particularly in summer), then the practical solution was to get the compressor and the spader out immediately after a death. But people thought you shouldn't do that in a cemetery. The only alternative was to dig it by hand. You can imagine trying to dig a grave in the middle of summer in rock-hard ground. A couple of times when people were dying we tried to keep a check on them to see how they were going. The family probably didn't appreciate it.*⁷⁴



Theodore Hotel

Len recalls that *one body requiring attention was that of a German called Bill who lived on an irrigation farm and who went missing. Eventually the Sergeant reported that Bill had been found in the irrigation channel. He used to travel about on a pushbike and drink too much and it seemed he'd fallen off and drowned in the channel. I had a bloke named McGregor who was a bit of a cabinet-maker and had made a few coffins. All we had was some inch hardwood, so he made this box and he painted it black. By then it was late at night. We brought Bill in and the Sergeant said he'd been in the water for a while so we'd better wrap him up. We donated a tent fly to wrap him in and put him in the coffin in our works. There were a lot of people in the pub next door including Wally who Bill had lived with for ages. We went and told Wally that Bill was in there and we were going to batten him down. Wally came and stood at the doorway and said, "Farewell, Billy" and went back to the pub.*⁷⁵

Problems in town were certainly perceived as the Commission's fault, or at least its responsibility. One night Len Redmond and Fred Haigh were sitting in the pub when a *fellow turned up at the counter with his daughter. She had a tea towel over her face.*

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*She'd fallen off her pushbike near their place a couple of miles out of town. Instead of taking her to the ambulance, he brought her in to show Fred how bad the roads were.*⁷⁶

The District Engineer was involved in everything. As the manager of the power station and the water supply, *if you were sitting having dinner when the lights start to flicker*, it was your problem. The Redmonds found the only way to escape the constant demands and responsibility was to leave. *We used to clear out of Theodore on a Saturday and go fishing at Binda Weir.*⁷⁷

Cec Redmond was a local girl who had worked in the local shop before joining the Commission. She worked for Bill Bromfield for two years before Len arrived in



Castle Creek flooding 1928

town and wooed and wed her. She thought that *Bill was very good to work for, but you had to wait till he woke up in the morning. He always came to work without brushing his hair. He wasn't a morning person.*⁷⁸ Bill, a graduate of the School of Military Engineering,⁷⁹ left IWSC to go to Tatura in Victoria and he eventually became Chief Commissioner of State Rivers and Water Supply Commission.

The office at Theodore in Len Redmond's day supported 15 staff.⁸⁰ Theodore had a population of approximately 200 and it seemed a happy town. Many residents were Displaced Persons who were sent there and had to stay a minimum of two years. Some stayed for a long time and made it their home. Most of them were young blokes who had come from European cities. Tomas Darabek from Poland stayed and became part of the town. The town was

generally accepting of the Commission staff who became part of the community. There was not a lot in the way of entertainment. *You couldn't miss the pictures in Theodore on a Saturday night.*⁸¹

Nearly every year there was flood. *Castle Creek crossing would go out and 'Smoothie' with his low loader would take people across to the other side. And then the sand flies came. We did evacuate the town in the '56 flood. It's a terrible situation when you can't get out. They used to use the cableway to get out – but it's not there any more. It was the only way to get across the river because there was no bridge. The roads were very ordinary. There were problems getting to Rockhampton or elsewhere in times of heavy rain.*⁸²

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Local characters included Snowy Holmes, who, on one occasion, rescued the Commission. A bit of concrete had fallen off Binda Weir and got jammed in the inlet works. Len Redmond went to Binda to see if he could do anything about it and there was Snowy. *He said he'd done a fair bit of diving and he turned out to be pretty good even though he'd been on the grog for years.*⁸³

Another was a surveyor, Sam Baxter, who drank to excess on occasions. One night in the pub, under the influence of drink, he verbally attacked a senior officer who was visiting the town. He realised it was December and rounded off his tirade with, "And a Merry Christmas to you. That'll fix you."⁸⁴ Tony Bucknell is able to report that Sam later became an ex-alcoholic. Tony never saw him have a drink and thought he was a *top surveyor*.⁸⁵

The Redmonds moved to Brisbane in 1960, but the District Office continued to operate. Its principal purpose since construction of the irrigation area was completed has been the operation and maintenance of the Dawson River system and the management of the water resource. Keith Perry Peddle was Officer-in-Charge for many years. In the late 1980s, Peter Moran served as District Engineer. Mick Patterson is the current Officer-in-Charge. This alternation of engineers and technical officers in the District Offices is typical of Commission policies – employing skills appropriate to the stage of development and providing opportunities for training.

The Theodore Irrigation Area has been only moderately successful. Many problems have resulted from its age – the properties are small, the infrastructure is inefficient and requires updating. The scheme does not pay its own way and relies on subsidies even to meet its operating expenses. Even though the system supplies only about 20% of the water supplied in the Emerald Irrigation Area, there are 50 farms in Theodore and 80 in Emerald and there are more meter outlets in Theodore. A number of attempts have been made to improve the situation. Several consultancies have been carried out and Commission officers such as Mike Keane have spent time attempting to solve the problem. A number of options were identified including replacing the broken-down components, rationalising the system by eliminating the components no longer serving a useful purpose, or upgrading the system and extending it to bring in more lands. The last option would require the injection of private money. The residents, who by now are third generation and interrelated, rejected expansion and went for rationalisation. This is really only a band-aid solution.⁸⁶

Emerald was a sleepy country town until the Commission changed it unrecognisably by providing a significant water supply from Fairbairn Dam. While he was Engineer-in-Charge of Selma Weir at Emerald in the 1950s, Bernie Credlin's duties included supervision of the construction of stock route watering points between Emerald, Charters Towers and Mackay. He also had some responsibility for the construction of

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Marian Weir at Mackay, or as much responsibility as you can have through 650 kilometres of distance by rail.⁸⁷

The 1950s were difficult years in Emerald. The Queensland British Food Corporation was busy with their farming activities at Capella, Clermont and Springsure. Good labour was hard to find and even harder to keep. Public servants



Ian Fox ready for a pig shoot

(except for railway employees) were somewhat social outcasts in Emerald in the early 1950s. Wool was £1 per pound and the grazing fraternity didn't talk much to people whose vocabulary was not made up of words such as 'crutching', 'clip' and 'drenching'. The other major group, the railway employees, barely tolerated those whose conversation was not liberally laced with '28 up and 31 down'.⁸⁸

By arrangement, Rockhampton office recruited labourers and issued rail warrants for travel to Emerald. Bernie Credlin recalls *probably the shortest term labourer was one from Rockhampton whose task was to add two bags of cement to each mixer load of sand and gravel. He didn't bother to open the cement bags.⁸⁹*

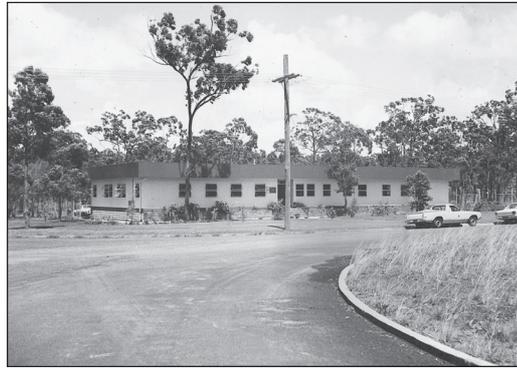
But major changes were in the offing as investigations into the Nogo Gap dam site (later Fairbairn Dam) approached finality and submissions were made to State and Federal Governments for approval of an irrigation scheme. The next instalment of the Emerald saga was dealt with in chapters 9 and 10.

Following completion of the irrigation area, the work changed from design and construction to operations requiring different skills. Jim Cook *was seconded out to Emerald in 1993 (to succeed Graeme Allan as District Engineer). I really didn't want to go, but I really liked it in the end. My wife didn't.⁹⁰*

Bundaberg has been a major cane area for many years, originally depending solely on rainfall but gradually utilising the area's aquifer systems to provide supplementary groundwater. The district office provided the usual range of services with groundwater management and farm advisory activities predominating until the 1960s. Works Supervisor Dave Wilmott served a term as Officer-in-Charge. John Harvey remembers Dave with affection. He was followed by Mike Norman who came from South Africa but didn't stay long. *He was followed by (Hydrogeologist) Michael McEnery who, whenever he had a problem, could be seen walking up and down outside the office with his slide rule until he'd worked the problem out.⁹¹*

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In 1967, Peter Bevin was sent there to investigate an irrigation scheme and to solve the groundwater problems. He was expected to be able to do that, because he had worked on the Burdekin. Peter is remembered for being *well ahead of the times in terms of the way he worked. He actually did work hard compared to everyone else. He was probably one of the few people who worked beyond the normal hours.* Everything with him was so fast. Paul Mills rang him to tell him he was a new engineer coming to Bundaberg. Peter quickly replied, *“Good, we’ll see you when you get here.” I thought, oh that was interesting. But that was just how he did it – it was all just rapid fire. Peter Bevin was obviously somebody who was going places.*⁹² If the job you were working on suddenly became important he’d be right with you, going out into the field and all. One of his best qualities was motivating others because *he had this ability to get beside you and his enthusiasm just sort of rubbed off. You’d spend an afternoon with Peter and would be firing for the next few weeks. He was a real powerhouse of energy.*⁹⁵ He also had great ability.



Bundaberg office, Enterprise Street 1990

Adrian Muller followed Peter as District Engineer, later being redesignated District Manager. According to Jim Cook, *Adrian was a bit of a character – a real visionary. He talked about the times when they would be reading gauges and send a signal up the hill so we’d be able to read it sitting in the office. We thought, “That will never happen.”* There were 56 people in the office all working and competing. Jim found that *you’d get a bit stressed at times, but Phil Byrnes and I used to go to the gym at lunchtime and work it off.*⁹⁴

It was a big office and many, such as Maurice Clewley, preferred the smaller offices. People transferred to Bundaberg tended to stay there for a long time. Bundaberg had a good climate and was a nice place to live. As a result, the staff did not have to *rely on their own types for a social life. You had to rely on the other systems.* Unlike in Townsville, where it was traditional to go for a Friday afternoon drink, it was sometimes difficult to find a drinking partner in the Bundaberg office. *So you had to rely on the few people who didn’t have established networks. There were a couple of junior engineers and the office girls were very social so they’d come and have a beer and that was all the social scene for the office.*⁹⁵ For married people it may have been better. *Paul Mills found a great bunch of people on rotation up there, all of whom lived in the government houses. There were lots of barbecues and as there were lots of people rotating through, we often welcomed new people and farewelled old ones.*⁹⁶



New DPI office, Enterprise Street mid-1990s

A memorable Bundaberg event for Doug Peterson was the cyclone which blew the roofs off many of the quarters. *We went out to repair them but we didn't have much to hold the roofs down, other than the Besser blocks that we put under the buildings. One bloke it didn't worry was Lennie Bauer, who took half a dozen valiums and got under the bed.*⁹⁷

Gympie District Office was established directly as result of the enactment of the *Farm Water Supplies Assistance Act* of 1958 as discussed in Chapter 11. The first office was located in the School of Arts, a very old building, now heritage-listed.⁹⁸ As Dave Coles describes it, *all of a sudden everything*

changed – the Nicklin government came into power and major dams stopped. I was sent to Gympie as Officer-in-Charge. I didn't want to go. All the money was put into irrigation and farm dams. Dave remained for many years, well into the 1970s. Among the many dedicated staff was the serendipitously named Dudley Groundwater, who was actually a surface water man.

Following construction of Borumba Dam, which serves irrigation areas in the Mary Valley and urban areas along the north coast, Dave was replaced by a District Engineer. Ian TJ Cameron was one such Engineer (not to be confused with Ian R Cameron, who resigned in the 1990s to join a consulting firm, Ian TJ took a Voluntary Early Retirement to sail his boat round the Whitsundays and drink moselle). On one occasion, DE Cameron supervised the release of water from Borumba and drove downstream to observe the release. Time went by and he observed nothing, so instructed the Storage Supervisor to open the valve wider. It was only after a second such instruction that he realised he was observing a tributary and not the main stream.

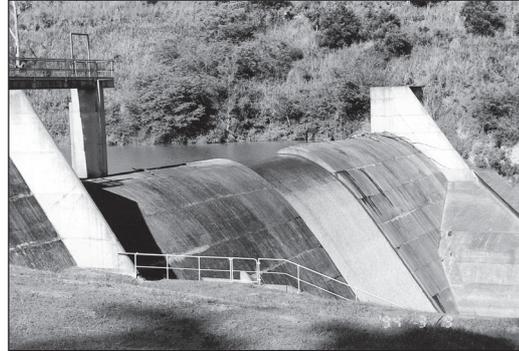
John Connolly was the second District Clerk in Gympie, Gordon Penny having been the first.⁹⁹ John was *involved with sending out the accounts to the new customers of the newly completed Borumba Dam. They were all dairy farmers and they weren't very impressed at all with having to pay for the water that they'd been getting free for years before that. I copped quite a lot of unhappy customers.*¹⁰⁰

Paul Mills became Acting District Engineer just before Christmas one year in the mid-1980s. In those days potential district engineers were assessed to see if they would cope. Within a day or two of arriving Paul Mills received a call from the local member informing him that the Premier wished to build a dam in the region and asking were there any sites. This was news to Paul but the local member assured him the government

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had money (as a result of the Wages Pause) and was looking for a project. Paul thought someone was just testing the new boy to see how he behaved. Suspiciously, he asked around. It wasn't a setup, but it was a politician's dream, which culminated in the construction of Cedar Pocket Dam.¹⁰¹

Paul managed a dozen staff in the District Office, working closely with DPI and was responsible for *everything Water Resources did in the area and had to liaise with people in Head Office.*¹⁰²



Cedar Pocket Dam

Following Paul's relocation to Brisbane, Ed Miller transferred to Gympie from Emerald. By this time, Bjelke-Petersen Dam had been completed and Ed had a major involvement in managing the allocation of water in the Barker–Barambah Irrigation Project. As a result of his hydrologic studies, it was decided to reduce the reliability of supply and thus free up more megalitres in most years.

During the 1980s restructuring discussions, agreement was reached that there should be a regional office in South-East Queensland. This area had previously been serviced on a *rather adhoc basis from various units out of Brisbane.*¹⁰³ Mike McKenna successfully applied for the job of Regional Engineer in 1986 and *created a new office in Brisbane – he had to start from scratch – there was no office, no nothing.*¹⁰⁴ For two and a half years, he worked with *a variety of people on a whole range of issues.* A unique feature of the district was the *density of politicians per square kilometre in South-East Queensland*, and Mike was *inundated with the amount of work that those sorts of people generate.* He particularly remembers discussions between Russ Hinze and Tom Fenwick regarding the Coomera River and the sand and gravel extraction. *It was quite interesting to sit between those two gentlemen and be a part of the discussions that would take place between them.*¹⁰⁵

The District Office was involved with the River Improvement Trusts in Boonah and Moreton Shires and the first pipeline that brought water across from North Stradbroke Island to Redland Shire. Mike dealt with many of the *interfaces between urban development and rural existence*, as development in South-East Queensland was *really gathering pace.* There was a significant degree of concern about the whole planning activity. *It was really, I suppose, when you look back at it, the emergence of the sort of SEQ 2001 planning process.*¹⁰⁶

As part of the move to regionalisation, long-term residents of Head Office were 'encouraged' to transfer to a region. Not surprisingly, Brisbane region was a popular

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destination because there was no need to uproot home and family. Many of the people who formed the Regional Office had been part of Head Office before, and Mike saw a need for *a slight cultural shift to service the community in the way that I was used to servicing it. That caused some problems, and I had some difficulties with staff in the South-East Region, but at the end of the day I think most people understood where I was coming from, and we solved, I think, a lot of the difficulties in improving the relationships with the community with a more structured approach through the South-East Regional Office. I still have a number of people in Gatton and other places who ring me and say, "What's going on?" I guess they appreciated my approach.*¹⁰⁷

Mike established an office in Gatton with Dan Coutts (son of surveyor Tony Coutts) as District Engineer. Despite the construction of a number of small works in the Lockyer Valley, water demands continue to exceed supplies and continued development of bores has placed water users under increasing stress as their water supplies diminish. The irrigators have remained strongly opposed to proclamation of the whole Valley under the Water Resources Act, so the Commission has been unable to exercise any administrative controls. The tensions between irrigators and with the Commission have not abated and Dan Coutts was relieved to obtain a transfer to Ayr. Hydrogeologist Ashley Bleakley appears to have coped remarkably well in his usual unflappable manner.

Chris Robson succeeded Mike in Brisbane in 1989. Diligent, hard-working and clearly marked as a man on the way up, Chris took to the post with considerable energy. By this time, mobile phones were becoming ubiquitous and Chris (like Peter Gilbey in the North) was able to conduct a considerable amount of business while driving thousands of kilometres using his 'hands-free' mobile phone. Norm Butler had not understood the full ramifications of his Telephone and Motor Car (TMC) engineers.

Among Chris's tasks were the management of the public meetings conducted following the Government's decisions on future water supply sources for South-East Queensland – the successors to the controversial Wolffdene Dam. In June 1991, he was seconded by the Public Service Management Commission (PSMC) to do a review for six to 12 weeks. Bevan Faulkner was acting Regional Engineer in South-East Queensland Division for 12 months.¹⁰⁸

Under the DPI regional structure, Tim Smith was appointed Regional Director South-East. When Chris Robson returned from his assignment, he was appointed Regional Manager in Nambour. Allan Murray became District Manager Water Resources in Brisbane. In due course, Tim Smith resigned to go into private enterprise and Dr Tony Pressland (who was not a water man) became Regional Service Director. Chris Robson became a General Manager in the new Resource Management business group and

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Allan Murray became Manager Regional Infrastructure Development South-East Region, but these later appointments, having occurred in 1995, are neither historic nor historical.

Toowoomba has been the centre for the South Region since the regional structure was created. It thus has oversight of Warwick, Goondiwindi, Roma and St George offices. Prior to regionalisation, it was a district office. The District Office was supposed to be in Dalby. The eastern bit of the Downs was supposed to be handled for Farm Advisory purposes by Des Foster from Warwick and the Dalby area was meant to be handled from Dalby by Mike Hopkins, who had inherited a family jewellery business and wanted to stay in Toowoomba. So he set up the office under his house. He and Ken Carmichael probably had a tug-of-war for some years but in the end Ken gave in and they realigned the offices. Mike took up an office in Margaret Street in 1964. He resigned in 1969.¹⁰⁹

George Clewett was appointed District Engineer in 1972. George was originally a Victorian who lived in an electorate which, according to him, kept the local Member on his toes by regularly swapping parties. A particularly good member got elected twice.

George used to travel by train from the western suburbs to Central each day he worked in Rivers and Streams. He claimed that he and the other regular passengers had decided that during the 1962 Federal election they would give the sitting Member for Moreton, Jim Killen, a fright. They would all (and persuade their friends to do likewise) vote 1 – Communist, 2 – Killen. The last seat declared after the election was Moreton, where Jim Killen was returned on Communist preferences to give the Liberal–Country Party coalition a majority of one. Prime Minister Bob Menzies allegedly remarked, “Killen, you were magnificent.”¹¹⁰

George was a very affable man who, according to Jim Weller, *developed a really good understanding of things. He never got back to the office from a field trip before 5.30. If things finished early he would go for a drive and check out the area.*¹¹¹

George once organised a fire drill and arranged for Denis Gilbard to come in yelling “Fire!” Six weeks later someone came running in from the car shed yelling “Fire!” Jim Weller and others *told him to get lost as we had had our fire drill weeks ago. The Christmas tree had been stored there and it had caught on fire under the wooden stairs, so we had to put it out.*¹¹²

George lived in a large house on the rim of the Great Dividing Range. The rain that fell on the eastern side of his house would finish up in the Pacific Ocean, whereas the rain on the western half of his roof finished up in Bass Strait.¹¹³ George loved Toowoomba, but found the winters hard. He usually developed an annual dose of bronchitis – probably not helped by his precious pipe. He spent five or six years as

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District Engineer before retiring in mid-1978. He died in 1982. His funeral was a marathon, attended by district managers from all around the State and people from everywhere. The drinking started around 6.00 a.m.¹¹⁴ It must have been somewhat like the Duke of Wellington's funeral, where it took six men to carry the beer.

George's son, Murray, followed in Father's footsteps, becoming a Civil Engineer. He went on to become the City Engineer in Toowoomba, but died in 2000, in his mid-50s. The Council chose to name a park after him. George's other son, Jeff, still works for DPI.

George's successor as District Engineer was Jim Uhlmann. Jim was a much quieter, less ebullient character. According to Jim Weller, *Jim (Uhlmann) was very finicky about things being in their place. George was the exact opposite.* He was, nevertheless, liked and admired for his efficiency and conscientiousness. He remained in Toowoomba until 1986, when he moved to Operations Branch in Brisbane. When, in 1992, the Commission offered Voluntary Early Retirements, Jim elected to accept one so that he could achieve a second lifelong ambition and join the clergy. He has subsequently retired.

Jim worked in many areas of the State (as noted in other chapters) and certainly made his contribution, demonstrating that while extroverts may receive more attention, quiet diligence is also productive. As a young man, Jim was transferred to St George. When District Engineer Bernie Credlin found he didn't have a driver's licence, he got Jim to drive in to the Police Station. They got to the station and saw the policeman, who immediately started typing his name. Bernie asked "Don't you want to test him?" The policeman responded, "No, my insurance isn't good enough. Do you want a truck licence?" Jim was given one and to this day he has a truck licence which he has never used but lets him drive a banana bus.¹¹⁵

Following Jim's transfer, Frank van Schagen became District Engineer (at a higher classification). In 1989, Frank was redesignated Regional Engineer South Region. With the amalgamation of the Commission into DPI, Frank was successful in gaining the appointment of Regional Director. He subsequently transferred to Head Office (and then the Resource Sciences Centre at Indooroopilly) and Greg Claydon became Regional Director and then Regional Service Director.

Jim Mylne was District Engineer under Frank, until he too chose to accept a VER. Jim spent a few years in a variety of pursuits totally unconnected with engineering, before coming back to the Department as a temporary employee.

Ross Krebs has had the major responsibility for water resources planning in the region for some years with various titles, the last of which was Regional Manager

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Regional Infrastructure Development. Ross has served in many areas of the State including (reluctantly) Head Office, Bundaberg, Mackay, Emerald and Goondiwindi. Being a regional centre, Toowoomba has had involvement in many facets of the water industry and employed people from many disciplines.¹¹⁶

Outposts of the region were located in the District Office at Warwick and the sub-district office at Roma. Warwick District, which includes the Border Rivers area in the Granite belt, has been largely concerned with licensing and farm advisory activities. Leslie Dam and the associated irrigation project lie within its boundaries.

Legendary among Officers-in-Charge is Des Foster, who managed the district for many years until he retired in 1988. Commonly known as 'The Red Roan', he was prone to outbursts of temper which would as rapidly blow over. Jim Weller recalls that *he would tolerate 15 minutes of lateness before tearing strips off you.*¹¹⁷ Des was a passionate golfer and golf administrator whose devotion increased after his retirement as he threw himself into his sport at local and national level, becoming President of the Australian Golf Union. He has represented the Union overseas and his efforts have been rewarded with both Imperial and Australian honours.

Following a now established pattern, the Commission appointed a District Engineer to succeed Des in the person of John Amprimo. John remained in the post until 1992 when he transferred to the Resource Management area in Brisbane. At this time, the North Branch Condamine works were coming on line and consideration was given to whether Warwick Office should remain open or whether it would be more effective to have its activities incorporated into the Toowoomba region. In the event it was decided to keep Warwick open, but for almost two years there were acting arrangements involving Russ Robson and Greg Murphy.¹¹⁸ The latter was eventually appointed as Officer-in-Charge. Greg, who has a groundwater advisory background, is still in that position. Greg's wife, Gwenda, is the daughter of Bill Johnstone (former Superintendent of Boring) and his parents-in-law live close by in Warwick.

Roma office is principally concerned with groundwater issues¹¹⁹ and farm advisory work.¹²⁰ In the mid-1980s, the Commission conducted an investigation into the town water supply for Roma in conjunction with the Department of Local Government (DLG). Commission officers¹²¹ examined the existing bores and potential new groundwater supplies, Project Planning engineers explored the prospects for surface water supplies on Bungil Creek, while DLG examined the reticulation network.¹²² It was found that the pump on one town bore had been working away day after day for years, without contributing one drop to the town water supply!¹²³

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Goondiwindi District Office was a horse of a different colour (the Goondi grey?), as it was set up specifically to serve the new Border Rivers scheme. The Commission was constructing authority for the proposed Mingoola Dam and a dozen weirs along the Border streams under a joint States' agreement (see Chapter 16). The Border Rivers Commission (BRC) name dominated office windows, stationery and even vehicles, which carried a special BRC registration.

Commissioner Lang gave young Alan Wickham only a few days' notice early in 1949 to catch the overnight train and establish the office. He was formally transferred a month later. His first vehicle was the first post-war model Land Rover, which sucked up dust into the cabin like a vacuum cleaner.

While construction was the main thrust, other district work still had to be addressed, including Bore Water Trusts and drilling supervision in the Artesian Basin. Boring Inspector Norm Holbrook managed these issues while Dave King and Bob Macarthur were involved in the continuing investigations of the Mingoola proposal and other weir and diversion sites.¹²⁴

Stream control was an interesting issue and Alan recalls *many of the local farmers – mainly tobacco farmers – were Europeans. I had to form the first Water Advisory Committee in Inglewood with these tough looking men from Central Europe. They were the sort that would cut each other's throats if they thought the other bloke was getting something he should get. Someone ran amok with a knife in Whetstone camp and Jim Couston had to call the police out.*¹²⁵

Alan left Goondiwindi to gain experience overseas and was replaced by the quietly-spoken Irishman Sam McCall, who took over the residence, store, office and the secretary Lexie McIntyre (whom he married). He later transferred to Longreach. Frank Lennon was stationed in Goondiwindi for some time before the



Boggabilla Weir

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office was closed in about 1969.¹²⁶ It had become apparent that the original concept of 12 weirs would not eventuate and the Mingoola site was inferior to the one on Pike Creek (Glenlyon).

There was an upsurge of interest in water issues in the area following the approval of Glenlyon Dam and in 1982 it was decided to open a new office in Goondiwindi. Jim Mylne was selected as the new District Engineer. Jim *started with empty rooms, boxes of records and equipment, a car, a phone and an order book in early 1982, but by the time he left in 1987, the office and its operation were quite significant.*¹²⁷

Jim's successor as District Engineer was Ross Krebs who transferred from Emerald. During Ross's term, water use continued to grow and diversion schemes such as the Callandoon Creek proposal (first investigated thirty years earlier) were implemented, diverting water from the McIntyre River into tributary streams. Boggabilla Weir was constructed in 1991. The innovative construction technique used was to select a site near a bend in the river, construct the weir 'in the dry' near the bend and then re-route the river to pass through the new weir. This resulted in a minor change in the location of the Queensland-NSW Border. Another feature of the weir was the elaborate (and expensive) fishway installed to allow fish to progress upstream and designed under the Border Rivers agreement by NSW.

Ross was succeeded in turn as District Engineer by Frank Walker. It had been apparent for some time that the rules that applied to irrigators in Queensland were very different from those on the other side of the border. NSW irrigators had higher water allocations (with lower reliabilities of supply) and through the use of water harvesting were working the resources harder and making bigger profits. Following the success of the St George auction of 'spare' supply, a similar auction was conducted in Goondiwindi under the management of Frank. It was clearly a commercial success.

St George was established as a district in the early twentieth century. In the 1950s, it covered an area half the size of Victoria and extended from the NSW border almost to Theodore and from Toowoomba to the Paroo River. By then its main responsibilities were supervision and advice on drilling artesian and sub-artesian bores and, with good seasons and high prices for meat and wool, drilling activity was intense. A hectic stock route watering point investigation and construction programme was under way and more than half the Bore Water Areas in Queensland (most with the Commissioner as the Board) were administered from St George.

Construction of the bridge and Jack Taylor Weir (completed 1953) became a major responsibility in the late 1940s and '50s. Immediately after Easter in 1948, Don Beattie and Bill Sharp were loaded onto a truck with a team of people going out to start the

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*initial St George weir. Bill Sharp left after about four or five months, and the then District Engineer followed him about two months after, so virtually by about eight months after I'd joined the Commission, I took over the job as District Engineer. It wasn't difficult. There wasn't really that much going on, except the weir and upgrading a lot of the stock route water facilities, but it managed to fill in the day quite well.*¹²⁸

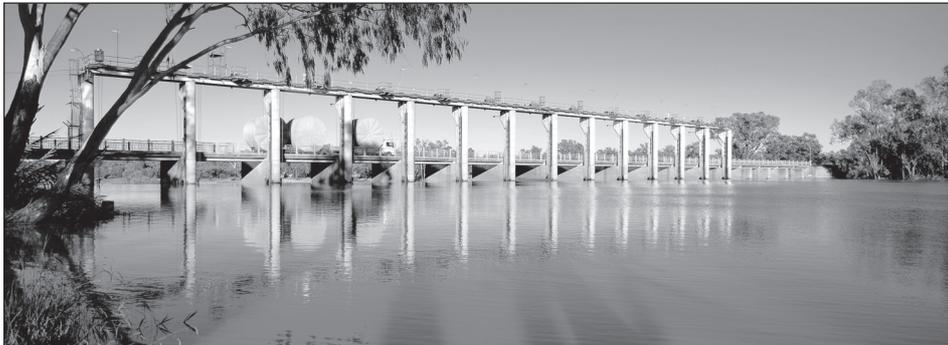
Don remembers being *relied on pretty heavily by a lot of the locals. I can recall I had a fairly stern lecture from Noel Eden not long after I'd got there. Some bloke had rung me up and said, "My bore drain has stopped flowing." I said, "Okay, we'll get someone out to have a look at it." Noel told me that was the wrong statement. He said, "Tell them to get off their bums and have a look at it themselves." That's the way you had to do it, because the district used to extend over a couple of hundred miles, and you really didn't have time to go out to every one. If you were silly enough to do it, they'd let you.*¹²⁹

With the commencement of the St George Irrigation Area and the first farmers being settled, life became extremely hectic. The first stage of irrigation in the area wasn't really successful. Roy Miller was a pioneer out there, drawing one of the first blocks reserved for Returned Soldiers after World War II. *They were unbelievable conditions those people had – they really struggled. They'd pitch a tent in the middle of a paddock and they'd have their furniture, their wardrobes and all their possessions under canvas. Later they'd build a bit of a shed and then eventually they built houses. It was a struggle until the second stage when they opened up more country and cotton came into the area.*¹³⁰ Roy later worked for the Commission in the store on a number of construction sites including Beardmore Dam, Fred Haigh Dam and Woongarra. His four sons also served for various periods. Reg and Phil still work for SunWater while Jeffery (known as Rip Tear) worked on the construction of Fred Haigh Dam and the youngest brother Michael completed his fitting apprenticeship at Woongarra when Massey-Ferguson closed down in Bundaberg.¹³¹

Initial reactions to the district were not always positive. Bernie Credlin was appointed District Engineer in 1953. *His first inclination was to turn around and leave. However, he came to like the place and spent eleven very happy years there. Work at St George was varied and immensely interesting although a large amount of travel, often over poor roads and tracks, was needed to get around the large district. I recall more than one night spent in a car bogged to the axles in black soil.*¹³²

District office staff in 1953 comprised Boring Supervisor Wally Stevenson, Boring Inspector Harry Plint and a clerk/typist Daree Bang (who married Des Foster). A party of surveyors under George Toone and a very small gang of construction men

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Jack Taylor Weir

repairing Mungindi Weir were also in the District. Bernie recalls *Wally, Harry and Daree were very highly respected in the community because of their association with the grazing industry. But anybody connected with the Irrigation Area was looked down upon by the locals because the Commission was introducing intensive farming to a traditional grazing area. Top quality freehold grazing land was resumed to create small farms and this was seen as a major threat to the grazier. I was personally abused by one sheep man for introducing the plough to the area. Another told me he would cut the throat of the first British breed ram introduced into the district. (Cross-bred fat lambs were recommended produce from the irrigated area and there was a fear that pure-bred Merino flocks would be contaminated by other breeds whose wool was vastly inferior to theirs.)*¹³³

Engineer Mick Moore was in St George to assist with the establishment of the Area. He discovered that he had not taken enough measurements in one of his surveys, and to rectify it he had gone out again on the Sunday and had paid for the chainman's time out of his own pocket. Gordon McDowell wrote to him and thanked him for doing this, but opined that maybe now he understood how important it was to get it right in the first place and not make a mistake like that. But as it was perhaps a little unreasonable that he should have to pay the chainman out of his own pocket, the Commission would graciously refund the cost of the chainman's wages.¹³⁴

A significant responsibility of the District Engineer at St George was helping the first irrigation farmers settle in and get their farms into production. Nineteen farms were balloted, 18 of 300 acres (120 hectares) and a smaller dairy farm. Few, if any, of the farmers had irrigation experience and almost none had ready access to the high level of funds needed to quickly develop their farms and to finance high-cost production like cotton and fat lambs. The financial resources of at least one farmer was a house in a western town which was overvalued and impossible to sell. One was previously a

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small store owner in urban NSW and another worked behind a counter in country NSW. Although inexperienced, they were hard workers and good people.¹³⁵

The banks did not want to know the new farmers, certainly not in this traditional grazing area. The Pastoral Houses, with the exception of New Zealand Loan, were totally unco-operative and the Agricultural Bank, which was intended to encourage smaller agricultural development, had its nearest Inspector at Dalby, about 320 kilometres away over a mostly gravel road and had a ridiculously low lending ceiling for untried farmers. There was little local advice available from the Agriculture and Stock Department (now Primary Industries). The cotton expert, Bill Steele, came occasionally from Brisbane and the fat lamb guru, Claude Smith, from Dalby. A local adviser, expert in merino flocks but without experience in fat lamb production, was able to help on general sheep health. After insects became a major cotton growing problem, the Agriculture and Stock Department stationed an entomologist at St George but regrettably he had written off cotton as a practical crop in the area and concentrated on studies of the kangaroo which earned him a Doctorate.¹³⁶

To try and overcome these problems IWSC established a farming plant pool and hired out equipment, often with operators. Water inspector Jim Cannell (father of Peter Cannell), who had some farming qualifications, was transferred to St George and tirelessly worked extremely long hours to do a fantastic job teaching, showing and encouraging farmers. Jim also established the Scouting movement in St George. Peter remembers *Dad taking on the task of pilot farm. They were good years, still boyhood years, but I can remember going out to the farms, having field days or shed days with potential new growers in the area. I remember the area developing from what they thought was pasture-growing-cum-sheep-fattening or lamb-fattening, to cotton production.*¹³⁷

Bernie Credlin was made an honorary (unpaid) Agricultural Bank inspector and did a lot of the inspectorial work and made loan recommendations, almost all of which were speedily approved. As inspector, Bernie got to know the General Manager very well. Bernie was once *visiting Brisbane and took up the Manager's invitation to call on him for a chat about the Irrigation Area. At that time there was still a lot of discussion (and argument) between the Commission and the bank about the operation of the (Farm Water Supplies Assistance) Act. While I was having my chat and a cuppa with the General Manager in his office in South Brisbane, his secretary came in and whispered to him. He replied, "I am busy with Mr Credlin. They will just have to wait." Quite a while later this was repeated and his reply was even more flamboyant and was obviously intended to impress me. Finally, as I left his office and walked through the waiting room, I almost bumped into two very angry gentlemen, Fred*

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*Haigh and Ken Carmichael. Not all that much later, back in Head Office, I was called to Fred's office. "What the bloody hell were you doing in Cameron's office?" he demanded. When I explained that by doing some of the Bank's work, I was greatly speeding up the granting of advances to the St George farmers and probably increasing the size of the loans, his anger subsided and he complimented me on my initiative.*¹³⁸

It was accepted that the major obstacle to a successful cotton industry at St George was lack of confidence. Neither farmers nor lenders would put in the time, effort or money needed to grow cotton until it was proved profitable to do so. Accordingly, the Commission underwrote one of the best farmers in the Area to grow 20 hectares (50 acres) of the crop. Bernie Credlin took Gordon Titmarsh on a tour of cotton growing areas including American farms in the Namoi Valley (NSW), where Gordon asked innumerable questions and pushed and prodded. IWSC paid for all the special procedures, fertilizers and insecticides recommended by the Agriculture and Stock expert and hired any special equipment needed. Under the agreement Gordon also, deservedly, got most of the profit. The result was that confidence in cotton growing in the area was established and the rest is history.¹³⁹

*Phil Sternes comments as a St George person who got picked up when the caravan rolled through town and never left, the activities of Water Resources in the area certainly gave that area the impetus. Without the Commission, it would just be dead now, a struggling sheep town.*¹⁴⁰

Sometimes credit for the resurrection of cotton in St George is given to an American syndicate, Southern Cross Cotton. SCC did obtain a lease on IWSC lands in the SGIA and grew a large area of cotton without much success and in fact went broke, owing even the Commission much money. Bernie Credlin believes the *principals of the Company had no actual cotton growing experience in the States.*¹⁴¹

The Commission people, even though they were promoting irrigation, were ultimately accepted as part of the community, particularly as many of them became actively involved in local organisations and became office-bearers in the Ambulance Brigade, the RSL, Rotary, the Lodges, the Scouts, Golf and Bowls Clubs, the Show Society and other bodies. Even though at times the officers' work placed them at variance with their neighbours,¹⁴² Bernie Credlin acknowledges that he made *many good friends of graziers in the District, including those whose land we compulsorily acquired.*¹⁴³

St George Office had originally been set up to manage groundwater in the area, and this work has continued (see Chapter 4). Wally Stevenson was one of the original artesian drillers who had sunk many deep bores. He enjoyed a most interesting life, having at various times also been a publican at Dunkeld (between St George and Mitchell) and Councillor of the Balonne Shire.

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Bernie Credlin describes Harry Plint as a *hard-working practical man who shunned publicity. Although he used few words, those uttered were always to the point and unambiguous. Harry was a self-employed well-borer before joining the army and spending several years in the Middle-East and New Guinea where he developed a serious internal complaint.* He joined the Commission after World War II. *Water divining was not favourably viewed in the post-war Commission and I was surprised one day to hear Harry say that when he had his own drilling plant he always 'divined' the site before moving in his rig. That way, said Harry, he could select a site with easy access for the heavy plant, relatively close proximity to drilling water and ample firewood. Harry's success rate was better than diviners because he was also a keen observer of natural features that might indicate the presence of groundwater and he checked other borehole logs in the area at the nearest IWSC office!*¹⁴⁴ *Harry drove himself extremely hard on behalf of the Commission, but also managed to find time to work hard for numerous voluntary organisations. The St George Memorial Club is a fitting tribute to Harry's efforts.*¹⁴⁵

Dick Hurn became a legend, having at various times worked as drover, driller, station manager, horse-breaker and on occasion as firewood-gatherer-engine-driver-fireman-pump-attendant on Brunette Downs. *Dick worked on his own for many months at a distant bore, cutting wood and feeding it to a steam-driven pump to water cattle on the huge pastoral property. His only contact with the outside world was once each fortnight when he was brought meat, salt, flour, tea and sugar.*¹⁴⁶

Paul Mills also calls Dick *a real character. He'd been a bore drain inspector for so many years that he functioned better out in the bush than anywhere else.* Dick took Paul under his wing at St George. *He was just marvellous. He used to get me to drive this big old Dodge truck over all the dirt roads and I think I nearly killed us once when I tried to overtake a semi-trailer and there was so much dust I couldn't see where we were going and I nearly bit a log. But Dick just enjoyed it and he could quite comfortably sit there and read a paper while we were doing about 100 kilometres an hour over dirt roads. Dick talked in a very slow voice and everything he said was very, very slow, just because he'd been out there so long.* Dick used to swap bread with Paul as he *couldn't eat fresh bread because he'd been out in the bush so long, that he just wasn't used to it.* Dick would buy a fresh loaf and give some to Paul who would return the left-overs as they dried out. *He was a loveable character.*¹⁴⁷

Dick was tough. As a boss/drover he carried dental forceps to relieve toothache among his employees, thus saving them a visit to a dentist in towns along the stock route and of course saving them from the temptations that go with those towns.¹⁴⁸

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Like all outback projects, obliged to pay no more than award wages, St George had its share of employee variety and heavy drinking. One Sunday afternoon Bernie Credlin received a message from the camp that one migrant was using a rifle to threaten others of a different ethnic background. *I went to the camp and found that the offender, 'Curly' R, the only Yugoslav in the camp, had been abused by several Poles, all of whom had been drinking. After much talking and gesturing, I got hold of the gun, put the bolt from it in my pocket, gave the gun back to Curly and told him that he was lucky I had not called the police, otherwise he would certainly be spending some time in the slammer. Curly was grateful for his let-off. A short time later, he left us and obtained a job as a gardener on a property and for a long time afterwards he regularly called at our place with a box of vegetables he had grown himself.*¹⁴⁹

A second incident which concerns a timekeeper nicknamed Jimmy the Zulu by Fred Barlow (actually Jimmy was a blond South African), was reported by Bernie. *Jimmy had been recruited in Head Office but we soon found that his work was hopeless. He was given his notice and a rail warrant back to Brisbane. He had spent some time in a pub where the local headmaster heard him blaming me for his failure and threatening to shoot me that night. The headmaster phoned our house to warn me, but as I was out of town, Sherry (Mrs Credlin) took the call. She quickly filled the bath and placed our young daughter in it, hoping the bath and water would stop or deflect any bullet and then rang the police. I arrived home to find the Sergeant present and then accompanied him when he interviewed Jimmy who denied making threats or having a gun. Jimmy was kept under covert surveillance until he left town several hours later. Our daughter had a great swim, and Sherry spent a long time mopping up the bathroom floor. Later the local doctor told me that Jimmy had demanded a certificate attributing his poor work to some medical condition or he would do me serious harm. The doctor did not take the threat seriously!*¹⁵⁰

Further change occurred in the nature of the work as more and more farmers moved into irrigated agriculture through water harvesting. The Commission responded by trying to develop fair licence conditions, but each new licence reduced the opportunity flows in the river for other irrigators, both in Queensland and across the border, and similarly reduced the frequency of 'beneficial flooding' (the occasions on which flows break the river banks and wet the flood plain) and reduced the 'environmental flow'. The various sectional interests have become more strident in their demands of the Department and of protection of their 'rights'¹⁵¹ from other groups, including those who lived at the bottom of the river system.



Tom Wallwork

The District Office has certainly become increasingly involved in community consultation. Greg Claydon describes relationships becoming strained during public meetings, with *people from one side of the ball standing up screaming, "Those idiots" (or words to that effect) "over there can't understand that" and the others getting up, "Point of order!"* There is little sign of the tensions easing as the competition for water and the interstate issues and environmental awareness escalate.¹⁵²

As noted earlier, the western part of Queensland was managed for many years from Winton until the District Office was moved to Longreach. The principal business of the office has always been management of bores and the Great Artesian Basin. For the most part, the Officer-in-Charge was an engineer who served a term of very varying length.¹⁵³

In 1967, Col Hazel transferred to Longreach as District Engineer and spent three very happy years there. *There was no promotion or anything for me to go to Longreach, but I went. I was really stupid – and I've deteriorated.*¹⁵⁴ When he arrived, there was no bitumen between Longreach and Winton, but by the time he left, it was just about complete.

Col established an excellent rapport with the staff and in particular the boring staff. Many of his tales are to be found in Chapter 4. Sandra Hazel found it a little more difficult to cope as a 25-year-old. On one occasion, she suggested that some of the Commission wives might like to come to her home for a cup of tea – and they took it as an order!¹⁵⁵

Following amalgamation with DPI, Longreach became a Regional Office with Warren Hoey and then Graeme Milligan in charge. Like most regional offices, Longreach has had its share of staff on rotation. Mike Keane lived in the barracks at Longreach for a time and found *it was really interesting work – particularly visiting properties – and everyone was really friendly.*¹⁵⁶ Engineer Dave Quinlan has been resident for more years than most.

The Commission has had an office in Charleville since at least 1951 and it has been a training ground for many officers. Not surprisingly, its principal activity has been artesian water supplies.

In 1967, Trevor Tuesley was appointed as District Clerk Charleville.¹⁵⁷ *Trevor stayed in the single men's barracks. They had the old choofer as a water heater. You needed to heat it only in winter because it was bore water and most houses had coolers for*

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Longreach flood 2000

*the summer time. It got really cold in winter. I went out one morning to the shower that someone had left dripping and there was an icicle right to the floor.*¹⁵⁸

At that time they had operator-connected phones – you had to turn the handle to get the operator. Trevor recalls *we had a cash credit account but we didn't make too many payments. Whenever we did we had to deduct stamp duty. On many occasions we'd go to the bank to deposit only one or two cents.*¹⁵⁹

On one occasion Trevor *had the opportunity to do some stream gauging with John Kennedy in Cooper Creek. It was a great experience. We lived under the stars. We actually got hopelessly bogged at Haddon Corner, the border of South Australia and Queensland. John Kennedy was a very good bushman and if there was any way for us to get out he would have managed it. We were very fortunate, because after many hours of trying to get out of the bog, a four-wheel drive came along. The fellow said to us, "You were lucky, you know. You could wait a week for someone to come along this track."* He pulled us out and we went on our way. A few weeks back from the trip, Trevor received a 'please explain' why an administrative officer was going on a field trip. Trevor recalls *we explained it as being short staffed. My only regret is that I didn't take enough film with me.*¹⁶⁰

Many Regional and District Engineers, of course, tried to give clerical staff some time in the bush so they knew what the Commission was doing. Bernie Credlin regularly took clerks with him to do low-level stream gauging and surveys and to record flood levels. The clerks were pleased to get out of the office for a day or two and there was never any criticism from Head Office, *probably because I didn't tell them.*¹⁶¹

Jon Henry, during a short spell as Acting District Engineer, discovered a large number of unlicensed bores in the District and set about rectifying the situation, unaware that domestic bores did not require licences.

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In 1977, Mike McKenna became District Engineer and, for two years, he got *involved in the western culture of graziers, of artesian bores and all those sorts of things that were very much a part of western life. He spent a considerable amount of time on rehabilitating some artesian bores, pumping mud and cement, and praying like bloody hell that when we pulled it all out, the bore would flow again. I can remember at least one occasion of that not happening, and we had to drill cement out of the hole to recover the flow.*¹⁶²

Mike worked with Alec Vitte and Bill Day and believes he caused them some concerns as he was a *greater risk-taker than some of my predecessors in terms of what we ought to do with the artesian basin.* He recalls *there was a fair degree of effort even at that stage going into the rehabilitation program, levelling bore drains and replacing them with pipes. He was involved in farm advisory and disputes over bore drains where there were 20,000 sheep hanging over the fence, denied access to a bore drain because of some bad blood between two neighbours, with a few shots being fired over fences and police getting involved.*¹⁶³

Many staff who spent time in Charleville found that being in town was enjoyable, with opportunities to socialise with the other itinerants such as the teachers, the Main Roads Department people and the 'Bank Johnnies'. Life-long friendships were made.¹⁶⁴ For some, like Trevor Tuesley, the social life revolved around the golf club. For others, the life was less rewarding and there has been a regular turnover of District Engineers and Clerks.¹⁶⁵

The Commission regions were first established in the nineteenth century to serve the west. The first artesian bore, Thurulgoona, was in Charleville District. So it is appropriate to end as we began – in the west. But the last word should surely go to Bernie Credlin. *Western office staff were a breed all of their own – tremendously hard-working, innovative, prepared to live under conditions unacceptable to most others, loyal to the District Engineer (God), workmates and the Commission. They had a laconic turn of phrase and a sense of humour right out of Henry Lawson and Tom O'Brien. People like Dick Hurn, Max Dean, Jack Rassmussen and others were a privilege to know.*¹⁶⁶