



ZOOLOGY DEPARTMENT, A BRIEF HISTORY

by

Tony Argyle, Technical Services Manager Retired

And in the beginning ...

The Faculty of Science in the then Canberra University College was formed in early 1959 with affiliation to the University of Melbourne

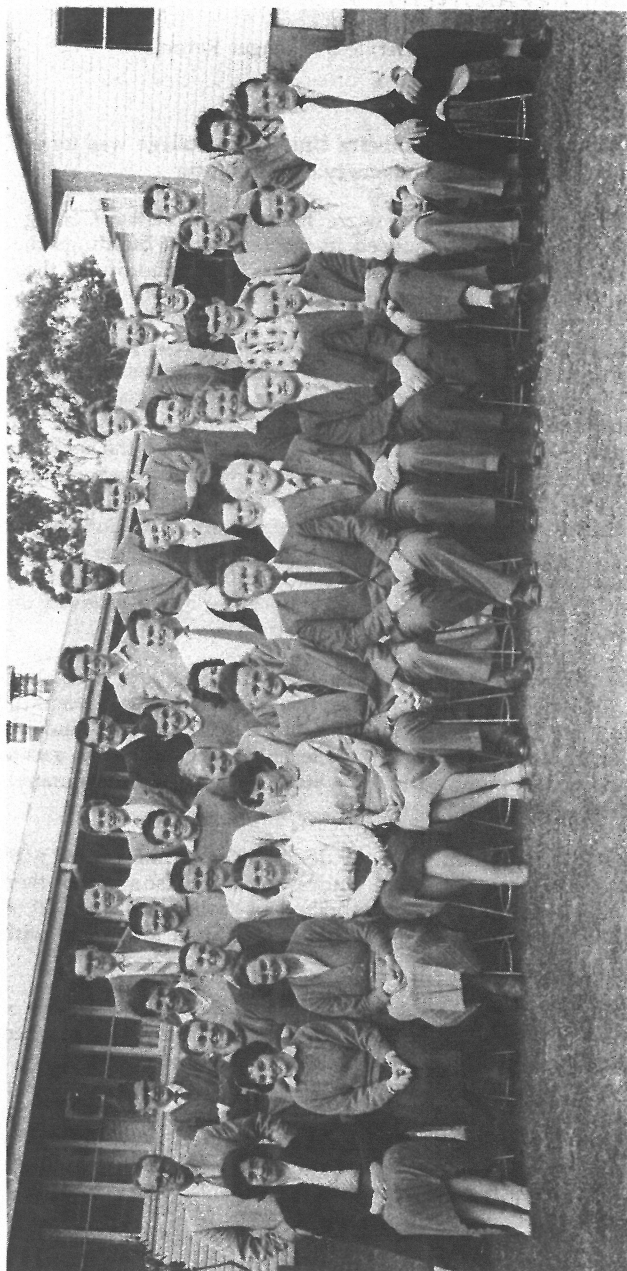
The departments formed at that time were Botany, Chemistry, Geology, Physics and Zoology. They were housed in the temporary buildings that were originally built for the John Curtin School in 1951. The life of these buildings was to be 5-10 years; they are still there in 1990.

The staff of the Science Faculty in 1959 numbered three per department. In Zoology it was Professor J.D. Smyth, Mrs Nan Foster the Secretary and the writer of this article, Tony Argyle, who was the lone technical man. We had six first year students in that year and a Volkswagen Kombi van was all that was required to take our students and staff on field trips (we left the Secretary behind). We shared the Kombi with Geology until we got a second-hand Land Rover in 1960 (Mike Gore of Questacon/National Science and Technology Centre still owns it). The Business Manager of the College, Mr P.W.N. (Val) Brett, was not too conversant with the machinations of these new science departments and he couldn't resist enquiring as to why petty cash was used for "Steak and eggs". I don't know if he really believed the answer "Cane Toad food". He wasn't too hard to train.

Warwick Nicholas arrived in 1960, doubling the number of academic staff, and he was followed rapidly by Dick Barwick, the young fresh-faced youthful lad straight from New Zealand. I think he was a bit miffed to find his "office" was in the top left hand corner of the teaching lab. He had to vacate it during classes he wasn't involved in (of which there were not too many). Hugh Tyndale-Biscoe also arrived in 1960.

After the quadrupling of academic staff we doubled the technical staff with the appointment of our first Australian Andrew Whitrod (son of the then police commissioner), and Tony Howkins joined us from NBSL in 1960 as Senior Technical Officer to J.D. Smyth. In 1961 we started to expand with various take-over bids.

A large hut was imported with great difficulty from Eastlake (a suburb of Canberra that was to be inundated by Lake Burley Griffin) and it was attached to our original hut, doubling our floor space. More staff were appointed. In 1961 the Canberra University College was amalgamated with the ANU in a relatively bloodless coup. John Clegg, another parasitologist, arrived from England and Alan Weatherly (an Australian) arrived from Glasgow University just after he caused an explosion which demolished part of the Zoology Department there; he was our fish man.



STAFF and STUDENTS of the
ENTIRE SCIENCE FACULTY, 1959

In about 1962 we extended into more huts recently vacated by the administration and we also acquired an old cottage into which we put some of our first PhD scholars. The kitchen became a dark room, the laundry housed our autoclave and Dick's snake collection, the third bedroom was our workshop which housed another new recruit Fred Geuggis. This time we went multinational as Fred was Swiss; henceforth all items issuing from the workshop were Swiss made!

We then had a garage erected at the back of the cottage for our animals but it proved to be too hot or cold for them. As a result they and our beautiful animal house man Bert Hobbs, moved over to Dickson (now Microbiology, NBSL) and Fred moved into the garage (not good enough for animals but OK for Fred).

In these days of plenty we had all the staff and equipment the heart desired. We even had two wash-up ladies - Mary Mooney and Mrs Hobbs (Bert's wife) - secretaries, research assistants, technicians, technical officers, senior technical officers, purchasing clerks. You name it, in the 60's we had it.

In 1963 the young pipe smoking Christopher Bryant arrived, as usual from England, as our entomologist. Don't ask why he was appointed as an entomologist; he doesn't even know himself and he shared (as he called it) a dog box with Noel Call, our newly appointed Histologist from Lismore.

In May 1962 the first sod was turned on our new building after years of planning. Our first ideas of a complete fully functional building were dashed by the usual problem of financial constraints with the result that the top floor and a small row of service rooms in the basement were the first stage. There are not many buildings built from the top down, but ours was. The only good point was lots of undercover parking for a few years. The Zoology building has the dubious honour of being the slowest to be built on campus due to problems with the piles (the buildings not peoples). Being built on an old creek bed, the piles had to go down some 37' instead of the 12' or so estimated. After the piles were in the metal frame of the building was erected and bolted together. However, they found that the bolts were not satisfactory and the whole frame had to be welded. A lone welder spent months welding the frame. I came by one day and saw two welders and I went into the lab in great excitement to tell the Prof that the workforce had doubled overnight. (The whole of Hobart Place was built during the time it took to build the first stage of the Zoology Building).

During this protracted building programme, life went on in our temporary quarters. Dick Hughes (a real entomologist) joined us from CSIRO in 1962 to teach invertebrate zoology.

Our animal house went on the move again in about 1963 to the old magnetometer hut which was out in the wilderness in the area now occupied by RSBS. It was good mushroom country then and the animals

were joined by various PhD scholars including the famous H. Robert Bustard and John Skidmore.

In 1964, 5 years after its foundation, the department had a staff of about 35. The main thrust of its research was parasitology - hydatids, nematodes and various other wormy items with Hugh Tyndale-Biscoe working on his wallabies at Kangaroo Island, Bob Bustard with his turtles at Heron Island and the odd Russian visitor doing field trips to remote central Australian locations. In January, 1965 the long awaited day arrived and in extreme temperatures we moved into the new building which in some points was not exactly finished, such as a staircase that finished about a metre from the ground. The last step was a lulu as the nightwatchman found out on the first night and he sued the ANU for megabucks.

With all this extra space more staff arrived - Peter Janssens in 1966, Tim Marples 1965, John Short, Vernon Harris and Bill Ewers were amongst the new members of the academic staff together with a small hoard of general staff and PhD students including young Mike Howell in 1966, fresh from New Zealand. Other notables included John Ling, John Hearn, Big Mike Johnstone, Stuart Branch, Sham Rai, Keith Dixon etc. etc. At one time we had three post-graduates called Hoo, Rai and Cheah (noisy lot). Other notables were Margaret Davies our demonstrator, Rosemary Rawlinson our fabulously efficient secretary, Robin Bootes our great receptionist/typist, John Dodds our electronics whizz, Idris Raham Muthy, a Mauritian from England to look after our practical classes, and Ivan Fox the photographer.

In 1966 the first stage of the animal house was built (we always did things in stages) and at long last after 5 moves the animals had a permanent home and dear old Bert had help at last. 1967 brought more building when we had B17, our basement teaching laboratory, built which commenced our "filling in" of the open ground floor area. When this laboratory was completed it was discovered that the toilet facilities were grossly inadequate, so to prevent corridor queueing etc. a toilet block was built next door to the new teaching lab to relieve congestion; that was stage 3.

The new laboratory also gave us three extra small rooms attached to it so we put David Heath in one of them, nicely out of the way with his hydatids, and we bought a beautiful expensive Ultramicrospectrophotometer from Mr Zeiss for another of the rooms. When it was all installed and running we even had the German Ambassador come and unveil it, launch it or whatever.

Notable personalities of the mid to late sixties included the inimitable David Morseth and Professor Paul Silverman, both of whom visited us from the US.

1968 saw the commencement of the rest of the filling in of the ground floor area with new workshops, store, common room, library museum, staff rooms, labs and an electron microscope suite being the main features. A pool was incorporated in the centre of the courtyard.

It was a difficult period being surrounded by builders and we also had to have all our original plumbing replaced. We had specified polythene waste plumbing but the builders and architects in their wisdom installed P.V.C. without telling us. When you put waste solvents into P.V.C. pipes they soften and expand. We got a plumbing consultant in to advise and he likened our pulsating maze of pipes to an "octopus fornicating with a set of bagpipes" - a very apt description.

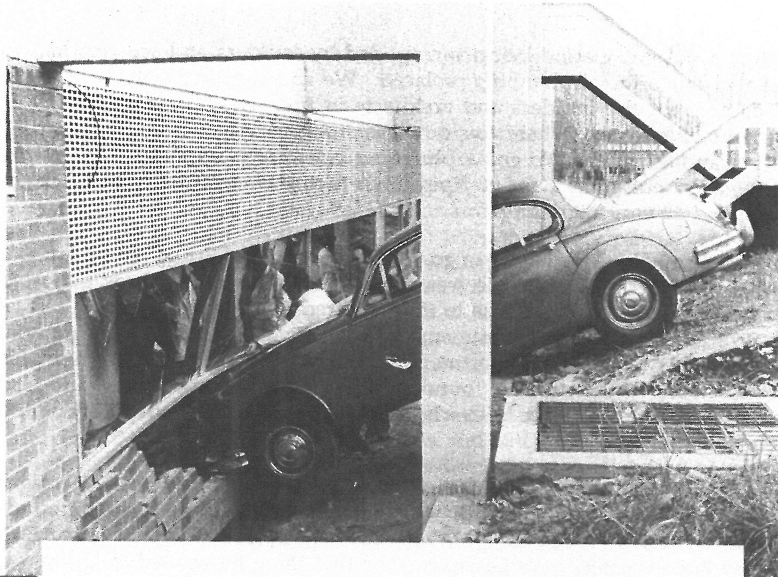
In 1968 Tony Howkins left us to go back to the Medical School and then later to help found the CCAE. He was replaced Ken Boyce who was imported from England at great expense to the management. Professor Smyth left us in 1970 to take up the appointment of Professor of Parasitology at Imperial College in London. The department owes much to Desmond Smyth for his tireless work in the difficult foundation years of the department, and also much missed was his wife Mim who was a great asset to the department and helpful to the staff.

Ken Boyce went over to the Medical School about the same time. Warwick Nicholas was acting Head until we commenced the Barnett years (sounds like a musical by Ivor Novello), with the arrival in 1971 of Professor S.A. (Tony) Barnett direct from Glasgow. The first thing he wanted to know was the location of his office in relation to Alan Weatherley's as he had been on the other side of the wall that Alan had demolished at Glasgow. He was most relieved when told it was on the other side of the building. However, Alan's Jaguar did roll down the bank in August 1970 demolishing the wall outside the common room with a resounding crash; he was being consistent. Chris Bryant was talking to Alan on the phone at the time and he was convinced that Alan had been shot by a disgruntled student.

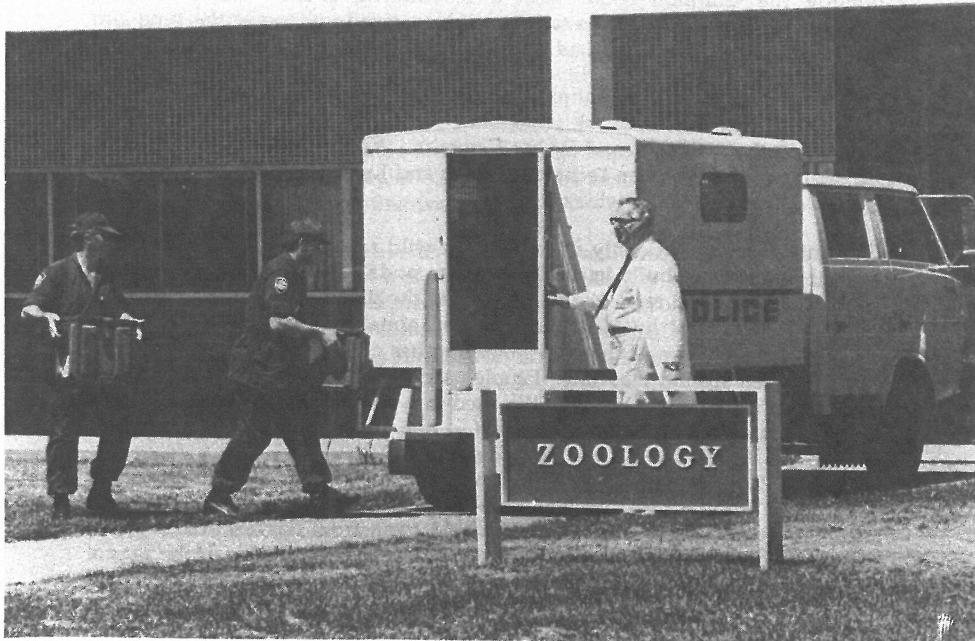
Professor Barnett was an animal behaviourist and some notable characters who joined him in this work were Phil Cowan from Glasgow to continue his PhD in the antipodes and Dr Jim Carstairs. Wayne Hocking replaced Ken Boyce as the prof's Senior Technical Officer and Lyle Carpenter replaced John Dodds as our electronics whizz.

Our animal house suddenly filled up with wild rats and an extension to the animal house was built in 1972 to accommodate rat mazes, cool rooms, computers and wild rats. We also acquired the dreaded H Block, one of the old original JCSMR huts, for large scale animal behavioural experiments and for the overflow of the enormous number of PhD and post-doc bodies that appeared around that time. People used to vanish for days and weeks at a time into its darkened portals. We used to warn people "If you're not good it's H Block for you!"

In about 1975 we lost Hugh Tyndale-Biscoe to CSIRO Wildlife and Alan Weatherly went off to Norway and subsequently to Canada. Arrivals included Peggy Horn, and David Happold fresh from darkest Africa. 1975 also brought about the completion of the Life Sciences building at the rear of the Zoology building, and this contained a new 1st year laboratory which was



SINGULAR EVENTS IN THE DEPARTMENT'S HISTORY



run by Sonia Tidemann, utilising a programmed pre-recorded teaching method.

After the mid 70's the economic stringencies started and we suffered the pain of the 1000 cuts. It was like being a salami sausage, having a slice cut off until only the wrinkled end bit was left.

In 1976 our Business Manager Val Brett retired. He had been a fantastic supporter of the department from the beginning to the extent of gaining the nickname of 'Santa Claus' but he also frequently mentioned a bloke called Buckley. Notable staff movements of the mid to late seventies included the arrival of Wendy Lees and the resignation of Mary Mooney and Robin Bootes. Some notable PhD and Honours students who left an indelible mark on the department included Bill Phillips, Simon Inwards, Patrick Filmer-Sankey, Jeremy Robertson, John Dengate, John Carter and Michael Guppy, the last three especially for their practical jokes. Dr P. Blakeney was an honoured visitor, and when his expenses were questioned by some, he disappeared as quickly as he came. One of our Indian PhD students also vanished into the depths of W.A. rather than return to his native country.

Other eminent visiting fellows around this time included Richard Sadlier, Richard Warwick and Stimmy Wilcox. They all left their mark on the department in one way or another!

Professor Barnett retired in 1980 and Warwick Nicholas was head of the department until Chris Bryant was appointed professor in 1983.

The early eighties continued to be years of fiscal deprivation and further slices were removed from the salami. We lost our librarian, our washer upper and (more importantly) our tea lady. Fred left the workshop to look after the practical classes and Bruce Barrie took over the workshop. Roy Bugden the storeman and even John Mortlock our man for all seasons retired and neither were replaced. A number of research technicians and research assistants positions were lost. John Short, our entomologist died suddenly in 1982, and Penny Gullan arrived and took over the entomological side of things.

After about 25 years of head banging, we were at last given a share of a native animal enclosure at the rest of Burgmann College and this relieved our animal holding problems significantly.

Our building programme continued with the construction of a brick outhouse for workshop storage. Also the north-west corner of the building continued to sink into the old creek bed and required jacking up as it had sunk so much it had sheered off the drains.

Andrew Cockburn joined the department in 1984 as our Lecturer in Ecology. Fred Geuggis, after a stint as O.I.C. Animal House, got absorbed into the Business Manager's empire. Vernon Harris retired and Chris Bryant became Dean of Science in 1986. Mike Howell then became Head of the Department for the ensuing 3 years.



THE EFFECT OF BUDGET CUTS.
STAFF/POSTGRADUATES 1972
(upper) and 1987 (lower).

New arrivals in 1987 included Paul Cooper and Steven Ambrose and the writer of this history took early retirement in October 1988. Peter Janssens took over the headship of the department in September 1989 to guide it until it vanishes in the re-organisational throes of the Faculty after its long and colourful history of 31 years. Many will mourn the passing of the department. It has had good and bad times and so the last slice (or wrinkled bit?) will be taken from the salami at the end of 1990.

In a potted history of this kind we cannot even start to mention all those who passed through the department. Apologies to anyone who feels missed out.

Hopefully, a Phoenix will arise from the ashes. I don't think the old Zoology will ever be forgotten by those who sailed with her.

Valé Zoology.

Tony Argyle
1959-1988