

Volume 9

The Burungulla Shire Council

Things have changed a bit on the Burungulla Shire Council, an institution not at all attuned to change.

The Shire President & his deputy Martin Carter got on the sherbet at the Orange Field Days and lock horns with a loaded grain train at a level crossing on their way home. Both are farmers who live in town & represent the entire town Ward. Due process grinds on & with the obsequies over nominations are called to replace these very long standing members.

Roger & Dimity De Crespigny are new to Burungulla. He's the Government agronomist stationed here & his wife a psychologist since arriving along with him in town has set up a regular practise & with government & local government contracts is making a deal of Headway.

After a dinner of Chicken Apricot & a fine bottle of Bertoli red they relax & discuss the widening of their local influence. Dimity my love he says here we are, living or if not living existing in this hick town, peopled by red necks, who have little idea of the big & polished world outside of its dusty borders. He says lets nominate for the two Town Ward spots before anyone else wakes up & tosses their hat into the ring. Oh Roger says, you outshine any possible candidate and with me alongside you with my University gained skills how could we go wrong. But apart from shaking this terrible little joint up & moving it into the new century what's in it for us dosh wise. Roger laughs, he's done his homework. \$42,500 per annum he says, plus, plus plus & for you \$9,700 plus allowances. Umm she says, that would finance a lot of weekends in Sydney. We could get the hell out of here at least one long weekend a month & visit where real people actually live.

So they go along next day & lodge their nominations & surprise, surprise, no one else does. Of the existing council members, the least any of them has served is 27 years & old Harry Elkins has just ticked over 50 years in his east ward seat.

On Friday evening at the Hay Club Harry Elkins takes his beer glass & does a straw poll of the likely outcome. The general consensus is that no one wants the job; they are happy & comfortable in their local member's slot. Bill Collins, another farmer, says why we don't give the Yuppies a go as President & Shire Deputy.

There are no dissenting ideas & when the Council meets in the upstairs council chamber of the venerable Town Hall this happens.

Changes occur overnight, the President orders up an unheard of trapping, a silver Mayoral Chain & the new Deputy Dimity changes the meeting supper from stubbies scotch, party pies & cold sausages to Petit Fours, cheese straws, strawberry Flamme & orange/mango juice. This is bad enough, but before the members start crying enough is enough Shire President Roger absorbs an out of the blue financial event. The N.S.W Government almost always broke are worried about their vote in the bush & dole out quite decent money or promises of money to distant dusty shires to improve things in individual Towns.

A heated swimming pool Roger crows to Dimity over a roast squab & champagne dine out in Double Bay. Do you think so Roger Dimity says, is that the best way to go.

Of course it is love he says, we cater for the youth of the Town who have not enough to do & the oldies who can get swimming exercise without walking or shuffling miles in out non-existent walk paths.

MMN Dimity says; let's have a few more champagne cocktails & a couple of Vintage Brandy chasers while we think about it. They decide to go ahead,

mainly because an Engineer who was at Sydney University with Roger is big in swimming pools. He tells Roger of one of his pool heating ideas. You burn sugar cane baled straw in a compact convection furnace he has invented, it's very cost effective & very efficient he says.

Thus the Shire President & his deputy President wife plot their campaign to inflict a heated pool on the inhabitants of Burungulla. They attack the selling campaign for this rather revolutionary idea for Burungulla with professional gusto.

By and large this Yuppie pair are big on Education but lack exposure to the harsh realities of Country life & its associated Mores. Roger has flexible working hours and makes time to sit in his Presidents office at the Shire Council expecting his Council Members to drop in for advice & guidance. No one – no one at all turns up, Roger is reduced to reading the Minutes of meetings past. His Shire C.E.O is no help at all. He's only been here six weeks longer than Roger & is a refugee from Council amalgamations in adventurous old Queensland. He is feeling his way as a Rookie C.E.O very carefully, proffers no advice to Roger.

Roger decides that if Mahomet won't come to the Mountain he will at least attempt to take the mountain to Mahomet. Mahomet in this case is clearly Harry Elkins, the known power broker of the council. You see him around town in Blundstones, worn jeans, a donkey jacket & wide awake hat. He has little to say to anyone or anything. Harry took over his shire seat from his dad half a century back, he runs quite a big farm in the north east of the Shire. Roger first has a go to engaging Harry in conversation at the bar of the Hay Club on Fridays nights. Harry and his cronies, most of them Shire Councillors sit at the L of the Bar, they seem to grunt among themselves, drink steadily & Roger can't get a look in with this closed mouthed little mob. He discusses this with

Dimity. She was the star at Uni of her psychology class, in theory she is qualified to advise Trial Lawyers on Jury member selection, she's big on Body Language & she's into Kinesics analysis, a catalogue of Interviewing & mildly interrogating people.

She is convinced she can tell if people are telling porkies to her simply by closely looking at body language- she is a devoted follower of Charles Darwin who said about a hundred years back "Repressed emotions almost always come to the surface in some form of body motion .Roger says I need to round up Old Harry socially with you to find the button I need to press with him to get forward motion in this - my Shire Constituency. But the only place he sees Harry is at the Club & he can't penetrate the screen of tough nuts surrounding Harry. But Roger has a M.A. With Honor's & he's done Communication 101 too. He turns to the pen, or rather his computer & puts up a well-researched series of position papers on three of the items currently of note before the Shire. The first is the matter of a heated swimming pool dear to Rogers part. Next up is the proposal to replace the milled timber used in road culverts with pre-cast concrete ones & last but not least is one that isn't a Shire Matter at all but for which the people behind the move to admit women to the Hay Club as members have asked the shire to officially back them on this move. Roger writes these matters to death & posts all this out with the next meeting agendas. He is hopeful that this will get the town moving. He goes to the Club Friday evening to see if his writing has provoked a reaction with his erstwhile members. They're not there — none of them. He asks around & all he gets is shrugs of the various shoulders. We can now have a peep, a very discreet peep, at where the members are they're all at the Elkins Shearing shed, all beautifully dressed in well pressed sheepmens gear, R.M. Williams's boots, twill trousers, impressive Harris Tweed Sports Coats, but hatless. The wool room has a concrete floor & they have comfortable furniture there, tall gas powered room heaters & a celebrity type chef cooking up a tickety boo French Meal for them. They are drinking Chinese beer, Ah Ming, probably the best beer in the world, Tasmanian

Whisky & Napa Valley wines. All of this is being saucily served up by a skimpy clad rish girl.

She serves, up the Chefs offerings. Langoustes, roast duckling excellent champagne. They slum it with sweets, old world Treacle tart topped with heaps of whipped cream. It's quite a repast. As they finish the girl whips around removing the debris of the meal & spacing out decanters of Port & several boxes of Cuban Cigars. Old Harry passes a top hat around the table & gets up to square off the girl and the Chef. They've been here before and know the form. Harry hands them out decent money & as usual they pack the left overs and unwashed plates in big plastic containers & quit the scene to allow the meeting to get down to private business matters. Tommy Murgatroyd draws on his stogie & opens the discussion. About this heated swimming pool he says. I do my swimming in the big dam on my top 60 acres. Usually during harvest to wash off the cocky chaff and sweat of the day. Usually also the Kangaroos don't mind coming in for drink while I'M having a dip, they're used to me. The Galahs & Major Mitchell Cockies do likewise & even the odd feral pig joins in for a slurp. I'm used to all these critters and we rub along O.K. I don't mind sharing. But he says I'm damned if Ill share heated a pool-heated for God's sake, the best environment to breed ear nose & throat bacillus of a transferable nature with odd looking & odd coloured locals that seem to be swarming into our little Town.

Yairs say Bert Mellow ship, that's a given. Now about the timber culverts. We're all using shearing sheds & sheep & cattle yards built out of milled hardwood from the murphy mobs grandfathers who supplied our grandfathers the material to build the infrastructure I'm banging on about. Having pre-cast concrete culverts seems fine but you can take it from me time when you want to replace old timber shed walls & extend the stock yards you won't be able to take your Truck down to Murphy's Saw mill and buy what you want for cash G.S.T. Free You can be sure & certain the concrete makers who operate near

one hundred miles away will be as much use to you as tits on a bull. The mob present vote on this in their usual way. The thumbs down around the table is universal. Bert Jones now pipes up. As for admitting women to the Hay Club, let me tell you that I only go to those hallowed halls to smoke me pipe & spit & to get away from women. There is epic rumble of Hear Hear around the table.

Yer know again he says, if you take a toddle around the cemetery here up on Gravel Hill you will see the tombstones of farming widows all read “Relict of” and names the late husband If we start this new rot of equality for women what will happen next? I'll tell you he says it may get to reading Mavis smith Partner of the late Bert. It's just not bloody on.

Old Bevan Nunan, as Irish as Paddy's pig says Well that's the next shire meeting agenda done with & dusted. But our new President & our new and comely Deputy President are educated folk. They're not at all bad at talking the talk. They will easily turn our arguments around. Or perhaps I'm not really talking about arguments— more about gut feelings — which would of course mean not a damn thing to them. They all look at Harry Elkins. Umm he says, this is what we'll do .The meeting of the Shire rolls around. The President despite having put out the proposal in long winded & boring fashion runs through the salient points & calls for a motion and speakers for and against. No one says anything, not a word. Rogers exhorts them, come come he says you are all substantial & successful people— you can't have nothing to say. But nothing is all his shire Members have to say & the three proposals simply lapse for the want of a seconder. Purple in the face Roger stands.

This is simply unbelievable he rants You, God help us, are the Local Government of this Shire, empowered To be so & voted into your spots years after year unopposed. You're not even the rear end of, local government. You are one & all Local Yokels & no intelligent person in his right mind would take what You are just at this point in time a dishing up. I won't have it he says, I

resign and I'm out of here. He storms out. Dimity remains seated. What now the hesitant C.E 0. Asks rhetorically. Harry Elkins taps his water glass with a pencil to Get attention. He points the pencil at Dimity & Moves it in the direction of the President chair. The girl's game & moves to it & under the circumstances does quite a good job of completing the meeting. When she gets home Roger is giving a bottle of Pot Still brandy a hiding. Turncoat he says— you took over? It's not worth fighting on, they're in total a flock of duck wits . Perhaps she says — I agree the shires not worth a spit but I wouldn't mind getting my hot little hands on that \$40,000 plus So she hangs in. The N.S.WA Government have been reducing member numbers on Shire Councils around N.S.W. so there's no problem. Harry Elkins in one of his rare comments says "Let's leave it as is & leave the Deputy as is until the next elections in 3 years less a bit time. And they do this.

As we know from the account of their shearing shed dinner the members are not unappreciative of a good looking younger woman among them. Dimity does a fine job as President & having seen the boys in action pulls the teeth on anything that could cause controversy & dissension. She runs her 3 year term less a bit out & consults with Roger on the strengths & weaknesses of the various Shire Members & who she should lobby to keep her interesting & well paid little job. They go through the lot with a fine tooth comb & in the run up to the election she lobbies the members hard in a most pleasant & flirtatious way, Days before the election she realises that she has completely overlooked pressuring Harry Elkins for his vote. She remarks on this to Roger.

Demonstrating his complete lack of understanding of local politics Roger says — don't even think about it— he isn't someone anybody would listen to. But Dimity is determined to leave no stone unturned Saturday afternoon she is down watching the men's hockey.

Old Harry Elkins is doing what he has done every winter Saturday for the past 55 years. He's the goal keeper for the Burungulla Bombers. He's seen it all before.

He's wearing his usual rig, Round Toed lace up farm boots, old cricket pads & and old tattered army great coat. He has a face mesh mask on with a hole in it to suck his pipe when the balls up the other end. The Game ends, before Harry's had a chance to move out of the goal square Dimity Mince's up. She looks the berries in a beautiful skirt & tight fitting jumper & boots. Oh Harry she cooes as she approaches the net & is a bit more than taken aback when the said Harry says It won't be you. Dimity She reddens, , you old goat she says, I'm the most outstandingly qualified to be made the proper Shire President. Further nettled she says — if it won't be me who will it be? Harry takes a drag on his old briar pipe & looks at her keenly with his blue twinkling eyes. "Haven't decided yet he says

