

APPENDIX A: St Peter's School, Cambridge:
The School Farm - Some Facts and Features

Since the school was built, the St Peter's School Farm has been an integral part of its operations. Initially it meant that the school was self-sufficient in terms of meat, vegetables and fruit. The milk from a herd of 35 cows supplied the needs of the school, as did the eggs from 250 hens. In September 1938 a further 68 acres was purchased from the estate of James Taylor, making a total of 277 acres. However, by 1940 it was clear that more could be done with the farmland and there was a change from mixed farming to intensive dairying. Development during the war years was slow, although the dairy herd had increased to approximately 120 milking cows and about 60 head of young stock.¹

Several general points are worth noting about the farm and its importance to the school. Broadhurst expressed it thus in his end-of-year speech in 1954 when he said, "Had it not been for the School Farm, St Peter's would have been in financial difficulties. All farm development, except buildings has been paid for out of revenue, and yet since 1947 the Farm has contributed altogether nearly £12,000 to the School finances." he continued, "but it was never the intention that the profits of the farm should be used to assist the School finances. Rather was it intended that the Farm profits should be used for School development. But it hasn't turned out like that."² So at once we see the importance of the farm financially to the school.

Of great importance to the school farm were the "academic" agriculturalists who were members of the St Peter's

Trust. Professor W. Riddet was effectively in charge of the farm from the very beginning of operations until his death in December 1958. He was replaced in April 1960 by Dr. C.P. McMeekan who remained until his untimely death in 1972, when Mr A.A. Johnson, formerly a dairy farm manager at Massey College, took his place for some time. Suffice to say that both Riddet and McMeekan who were leading New Zealand agriculturalists in their time, as well as knowing a great deal of theory about farming, were also extremely practical. Two other men, both Old Boys of the school, should also be noted for their practical advice and special interest in the Farm during their respective periods as Trustees. They were Messrs G.J. Hodgson and J.S. Coles.

The man who deserves special mention is Mr. S.R. (Sid) Newnham, not only for his very able management of the farm for over half the school's existence (1947-1975), but also for his outstanding service to St Peter's School.³

Mr Newnham had been an agricultural contractor before the Second World War. After serving in the Air Force during the war, he was anxious to get back onto the land. He applied for a job as field foreman at Massey College to which he was appointed and where he was under the immediate direction of Mr Alan Johnson, mentioned above. A.A. Johnson, a Dairy Farm Manager, and lecturer in dairying at Massey College was in turn responsible to Professor Riddet, so naturally the three men had a lot to do with each other.⁴ It was when the St Peter's Farm Management position came up that Riddet decided Sid Newnham was the man for the job. Newnham describes a visit to St Peter's to be interviewed

by Mr Broadhurst. He arrived at dusk when there was a power failure and Broadhurst was working at his desk with two candles. "Come round by the window so that I can have a good look at you." was one of Broadhurst's early remarks. Newnham evidently passed the scrutiny because the following weekend he returned with Professor Riddet to have a good look at the farm. Having accepted the job, he was always directly responsible to Riddet (later McMeekan)⁵.

Under Sid Newnham's management the farm really bourgeoned, and became very scientifically run and highly productive. In 1972 Mr. Newnham was given the additional responsibility of School Manager, a position he held for a few years before his retirement. The job not only incorporated his previous one, but gave him the responsibility for all staff, and their respective activities (except the teachers). This was a very big job indeed.

One task which Newnham undertook was the development of a road to the new secondary school classrooms and boarding houses, putting down rock and gravel foundations for this and also levelling the ground for additional playing fields - in fact doubling them. The job involved choosing a route which would cause least disruption to old established trees, and in some cases moving fences, pulling out hedges and so on. Mr Newnham finally resigned and was invited to join the Trustees. He did so for a while and then decided to resign altogether so that he did not feel he had to be worrying about the farm any longer.⁶

The growth and profitability of the farm had been a significant factor in the development of the School and in

the latter part of David Thornton's era this was no exception. With the acquisition of adjoining properties the total area of the farm and School was 533 acres. Each addition required extensive improvements so that by 1975 there was very little of the 460 acres of the farm that was not fully productive. The Town Milk Quota then stood at 500 gallons per day. This was Town Supply on a large scale, made possible by the adequate acreage giving an economically viable unit; suitable climatic and soil-type conditions; physical situation in the heart of a prosperous and well serviced area, and the ever present stimuli provided by being part of St Peter's School.⁷

With the increase in farm operations it became necessary to re-organise the working of the farm. This was done by milking two herds in two sheds - a situation which was imposed when an adjoining property was purchased - and milking about 320 cows. In 1975 a rotary-type shed was built with the object of greater efficiency, an increase in the herd, and better control of feed and pasture. By the time of Thornton's retirement in December 1978, the whole farm was a highly organized, efficient and profitable example of intensive grassland farming. A great tribute to Professor Riddet, Dr McMeekan, but above all, to the man who had the day-to-day responsibility for working and managing the School Farm, Mr Sid Newnham.⁸

The farm, from the School's inception, has always been a big financial asset and an integral part of the school. It has shown some interesting features and innovations as a farming entity too. The following represents merely a sample

of these (from the Broadhurst era):

1937: "The farm, 159 acres in extent, promises to be outstanding of its type. Well laid out and planned, it consists of good land, easily worked, well-watered, and when the shelter-belts, already planted, have developed it should be an ideal property.

The Jersey herd is a good clean one and the dairy itself is most up-to-date. Additional to the milking herd of 35 cows, 500 ewes are carried, also 250 hens, and the usual dry stock. It is hoped shortly to introduce, in addition to the Jersey cows, a Red Poll herd for milking and for beef. Every attempt is being made to develop the farm on sound modern lines, so that it, too, will be worthy of the institution of which it is such an important part." 9

1939: "The Dairy has been kept up to date and a new cooling plant for the milk used for School consumption is a recent valuable acquisition, while regular and frequent tests are made of the Herd in order to ensure freedom from disease.

The establishment of a Red Poll Pedigree Herd is progressing, and a valuable addition to this department has been made by the importation of a Bull from the Knepp Castle Herd, Horsham, Sussex.

In order to increase production, additions have been made to the Jersey Herd, approximately 50 cows being milked at present, and further increases are contemplated for 1940.

Pigs are carried to provide the School with pork and bacon. In addition there are 300 ewes with lambs, and about 200 poultry.

Show successes for 1939 include:

First Prize for Jersey cow in milk - judged at Cambridge, N.Z.

First Prize for pen of beef cattle -
judged at Smithfield, England.

First Prize for porkers - judged at
Westfield, N.Z."10

1940: "The year has been one of considerable progress on the Farm, marking an important stage in the transition from mixed farming to intensive dairying. The size of the dairy herd has been practically doubled during the current season, and the further fifty per cent increase planned for next season will bring the herd up to a total of 120 cows. Only 250 ewes will be carried for fat lamb production next year.

A modern six-bail dairy in reinforced concrete and equipped with welded tubular steel bails was completed in September and new calf-feeding facilities have been provided. New subdivisional fences and access races appropriate to the changed conditions are now under construction.

Numerous tile, mole and open drains have been laid down, new hedges and shelter belts planted in Lombardy poplar, seedless barberry, and pampas grass, and a further area of eight acres has been sown down in improved strains of permanent pasture species." 11

1945: "An event of much scientific interest, which may have far reaching importance in the improvement of stock in N.Z. occurred on the farm in April, 1945. There were then born two heifer calves from two cows that had been mated by the modern method of artificial insemination with live sperm which had been collected from a specially good bull in Australia and conveyed to N.Z. in a special container by air. This event together with a similar one at the Ruakura Animal Research Station at the same time, marks the first realization in N.Z. from the mating of a N.Z. female dairy animal

with a male in another country. Since it demonstrates the practicability of the mating successfully of animals in countries widely apart, it opens up enormous possibilities in stock improvement due fundamentally to the rapidity of air transit and the progress made in the science of breeding." 12

1948: "In addition to a small herd of select Friesian cattle, a nucleus of a good herd of purebred Jerseys has been established. The latter is based on the best available proven families of Jerseys. These, as also the grade Jerseys, are being bred to proven sires. At the present time the herd extends to approximately 120 milking cows, of which 38 are Friesians and 82 Jerseys (15 purebred). The herd had the distinction of having the highest average production per cow for herds of the Hautapu-Tamahere group during the 1947-48 dairying season, and one cow in the herd had the highest individual yield of butterfat.

The School farm continues not only to provide milk for the School, but also to supply the borough of Cambridge with a substantial portion of its needs. About half of the annual production of the herd is used by the School and town. In spite of the production of milk all the year round, the output of the farm in butterfat per acre compares more than favourably with that of other farms in the neighbourhood." 13,14

Footnotes:

1. n.a., Viewpoint [St Peter's School, Cambridge, N.Z.]
(Cambridge, 1974), pp.7,8.
2. St Peter's Chronicle, 1954, p.15.
3. Chronicle, 1959, p.11; C.L. Riddet, personal communication, 19 March 1985.
4. Vikki Baxter, personal communication, 14 January 1986.
Miss Baxter is an archivist at Ruakura Research Station.
5. S.R. Newnham, interview 12 March 1984.
6. Idem.
7. Viewpoint (Cambridge, 1974) p.8.
8. Idem.
9. St Peter's Chronicle, 1937, pp.40,41.
10. Chronicle, 1939, pp.58,59.
11. Chronicle, 1940, p.65.
12. Chronicle, 1945, p.49.
13. Chronicle, 1948, p.30.
14. See page 94 above.

STRUCTA SAXO (FOUNDED UPON A ROCK):
THE GENESIS AND DEVELOPMENT OF A.F.B. BROADHURST'S
ENGLISH-STYLE PREPARATORY BOARDING SCHOOL FOR BOYS
SAINT PETER'S SCHOOL, CAMBRIDGE, NEW ZEALAND
1936 - 1978

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Arts in English and History
at the
University of Waikato
by
FRANCIS ARTHUR LOVELACE BULL

University of Waikato

1986