

SAPWSC NEWS LETTER

Editors Comment

I hope this Autumn news letter finds all our members, and their families in good health. The last two years have played havoc in our lives with covid restrictions and all the inconvenience that the pandemic has put upon us.

However, things are starting to normalise after two years of this pandemic, and the upheaval it has caused to so many lives has begun to ease. The floods in the eastern states seem never ending, some towns (e.g.Lismore) being hit multiple times just as people are getting their lives back together, more rain comes along; taking them back to cleaning up again. We are lucky to be living in Australia though with all that nature brings we always seem to find a way to help and look after each-other. We must spare a thought for those in Eastern Europe who are suffering displacement and devastation not seen since the second world war.

We can be sure of two things, in these uncertain times, people still need to eat and sheep still need to be shorn. The high prices for Australian sheep meat is unlikely to stay at current levels and the wool market continues to trade sideways. Wool is unlikely to either see a spike or drop in price for a while until the global economic conditions improve. With China processing 90% of our wool and consuming half of that product, how the Chinese economy is travelling becomes a major factor.

COVID-19, dwindling national sheep flock drive shortage of shearers in WA. The coronavirus has stopped international shearers from filling vacancies in Australian woolsheds, shearing contractors are finding it hard to attract young people to the industry. Australia's sheep flock has more than halved in the last 40 years, leaving less work for full-time shearers. All is not lost we have shearing schools running. The vice president of the SAPWSC Kevin Gellatly is playing a pivotal roll in giving young people the opportunity to gain employment in the shearing industry.

Shearer Shortage goes on

This photo is from the February edition of the Countryman Newspaper :AWI trainer Kevin Gellatly (Vice President of the SAPWSC), shearing student Lawrence Arber, Bay of isle shearing contractor Steve Allison, Shearing student Henco Maree and Esperance wool grower Rohan Marold. Kevin was quite impressed with the commitment of the participants whose age ranged from 14-18 years. The woolgrower Mr Marold was happy to host the students and would welcome them back next year.



Shearer Shortage 1997



Some interesting articles from 1997 and 2002 may give us an opportunity to reflect on the current dilemma around the shortage of shearers. This article talks of many young men being lured away to the mining industry. The WA farmers federation wool section president (at the time) Max Watts says that he would like to see an investigation into Tax incentives and breaks to make the industry more attractive to shearers. That never happened.

Shearers National Survey 2000

A survey taken by the AWU in 2002 determined that the working conditions of WA shearers were the worst in the country. Bill Shorten, the national secretary of the AWU at the time,

said a national survey had shown:

- 87% of shearers did not believe their income would provide them with a comfortable retirement.
- 70% would not encourage their friends, family or children to enter the industry.
- 68% believed they were having to travel much more than in the past.
- 61% said their job had a bad impact on their personal lives.



were only 2,000 fulltime shearers working in WA. In 1990 there were 30,000 fulltime shearers across Australia now (2002) there is only a third of that number.

Keep in mind this article was put to print in 2002.

It's Official.....

If you are a shearer, are learning to shear or like me have fond (and or not so fond) memories of a life shearing sheep it's official , you are doing, will be doing or have done the hardest most physically taxing job in Australia possibly the world.



Australia was once said to be riding on the sheep's back. But a new study has found that a better way of saying it may have been that the country was riding on the shearer's back because the research has found that shearing sheep puts more stress on the body than any other job, making Australian shearers the hardest workers in the world in terms of physical output and calorie uptake.

If Jackie Howe were alive today, he'd be the perfect case study for David Stuart . He's a lecturer in exercise physiology at the University of South Australia and has been surveying the work conditions of shearers. David Stuart took physiological equipment into the field, measuring heart rate, oxygen consumption , calculating caloric loss and fluid loss. He goes on to say, that shearers have to handle a very high heart rate. Its okay to have your heart rate up around the 140 to 150 beats a minute for periods of time, but shearers do it for eight hours a day, five days a week. This alone would classify shearing as very hard work. Oxygen consumption was also calculated. This came out to be around 1.5-1.6 metres a minute continuously this alone is considered vey hard heavy work. Further to this, and considered to be the most amazing finding was when energy expenditure (kilo- calories) was calculated. An AFL player will expend about 5000-5500 kilo-calories playing a game of AFL at the MCG a shearer does that every day for five days a week.

Unlike shearers before them, those entering the industry today have all the science, research and development to assist them in their endeavours. Young, up and coming shearers would be well advised to utilise all that is available to them to ensure their careers , in the shearing industry, are long and rewarding.

The way I replaced those kilo-calories, and I'm not a doctor, was to consume a nice cold beer or two after a hard days shearing. Not to many though you don't want to be dehydrated the next day.

Industrial Accidents in The Shearing and Agriculture industry .

WorkSafe investigates death of shearer

WorkSafe is investigating the work-related death of a shearer at Katrine, between Northam and Toodyay. The man was reported to have been placing wool into a wool press yesterday when he was caught in the machinery. WorkSafe investigators examine the circumstances of incidents in workplaces with a view to ensuring compliance and preventing future incidents of a similar nature.



Industrial accidents cost the Agri industry \$30,735,438 Annually.

WorkSafe WA Commissioner Darren Kavanagh said any work-related death was a tragedy, and relayed his sincere condolences to the man’s family. “The agriculture industry has unfortunately experienced six deaths over the past ten months, and this needs to improve,” Mr Kavanagh said. “Agriculture frequently appears as one of the top three industries for workplace deaths, and there’s an increasing need to give greater priority to safety and health.” The SAPWSC offer condolences to the family. Worksafe Media Release Friday, January 14, 2022 - 10:45

Farewell George Monk

The SAPWSC News Letter records ,with regret, the unfortunate passing of George Louis Monck on Dec 3rd 2021. The SAPWSC would like to offer their sincere condolences to the Monck family. I worked with George for some years in Bullaring and found him to be an absolute gentleman a genuinely nice guy.

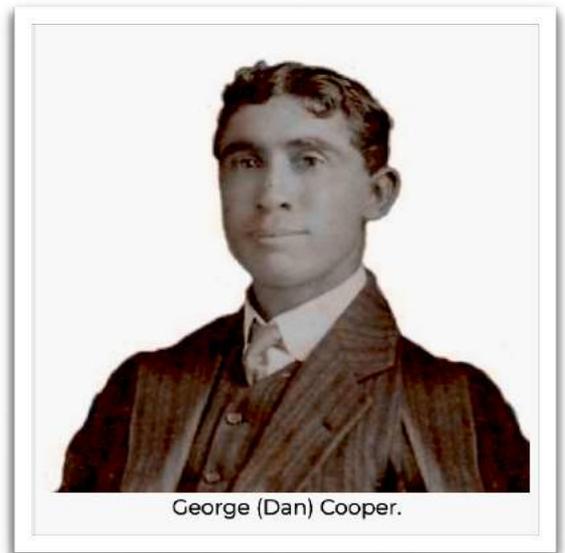


New inductees into the shearers hall of fame

Australia's Shearers Hall of Fame at Hay in NSW has welcomed another cohort of inductees, including one who is still shearing, Gene Mills from Young(NSW), Cathryn Wendelborn and George (Dan) Cooper. I will feature George (Dan) Cooper given his Western Australian connection and Cathy Wendelborn being the First woman inductee.

George (Dan) Cooper, distinguished shearer, weightlifter and axe man.

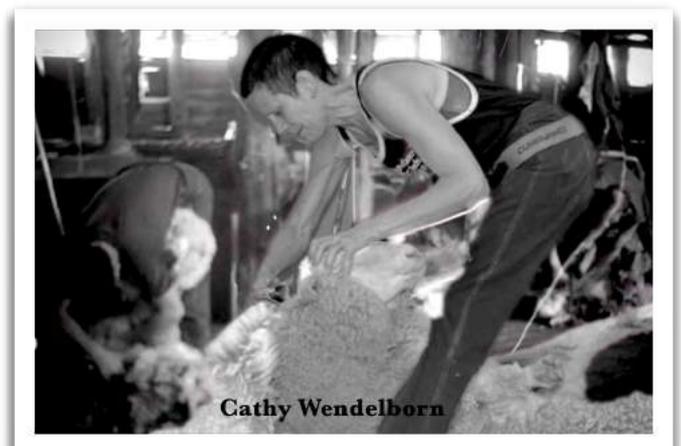
George (Dan) Cooper was a quiet unassuming indigenous man from Moree in NSW. He became an outstanding shearer and also attained distinction as a weightlifter and as an axe man. He achieved a world record of 316 sheep at 'Bundoran Station' in North Queensland in 1910. In 1911, he defeated South Australian Bill Day in a competition billed as the world championship in Sydney. George also shored in New England and Monaro in NSW. During 1918, he was recruited to shear in WA where he became one of our outstanding shearers. He was born in 1882 and died in 1943 at his home in South Perth, Western Australia.



George (Dan) Cooper.

The First female inductee into the Shearers hall of fame Cathy Wendelborn.

Cathryn Wendelborn, was born in 1963 at Riverton, South Australia. Cathy began shearing in 1982 and became a trailblazer for women shearers. She travelled widely shearing in Australia and New Zealand. Cathy became very involved in competitions and convened the Millicent event for 15 years while competing throughout Australia in open class events against the men and made many finals. At the opening of the National Wool Centre in Geelong in 1988 she shored before the Queen and presented her with a staple of wool. At the world championships in Ireland in 1998 she won the Ladies Invitation event. Cathy retired from shearing in 2004 when she bought the Quilpie Bakery in Queensland. "Off-Shears Bakery" is the name of her business. If you ever find yourself in Quilpie drop in and say hello.



Cathy Wendelborn

Tom Gibson lived to shear and fish.

By Bernie Walker

Whenever there is a debate or discussion about the Western Australia gun shearers the name of Thomas Kelly Gibson (pictured opposite) is certain to be mentioned. Born in Victoria in 1909, he began shearing at 16, which proved to be the beginning of a 52 year career.

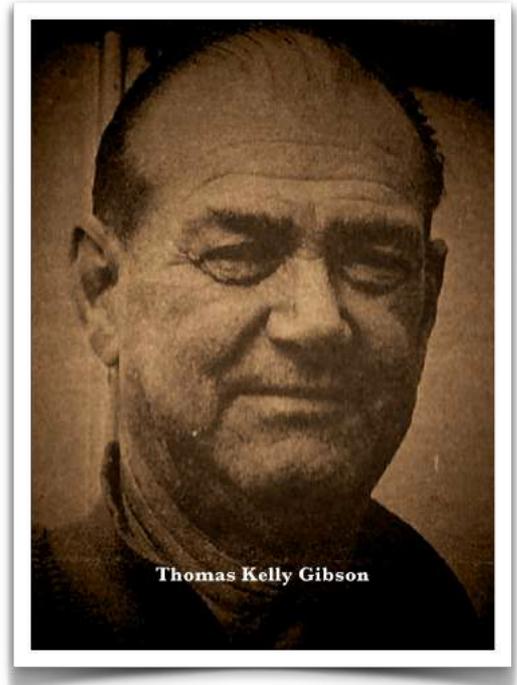
Having shorn his first 200, the next year he shored as far north as Julia Creek in Queensland before he heard Western Australia was a good place to be shearing. In 1936 he ventured over to the West where he became a very well-known identity in the industry. He joined Peter and Val Hobson's team on their northern run. When widely known and respected WA shearer Kevin Gellatly joined the team as a teenager for his first trip to the north, he became Tom's pen mate.

Kevin says Tom was the best pen mate he ever had and taught him so much about the job. One thing that impressed him which he has never forgotten was Tom's temperament and attitude. He was very even tempered and had a tremendous work ethic, evidenced by his best yearly tally of 45,000 in 1945, according to Mark Synnot, one of the biggest contractors in Western Australia.

Tom shored over 300 four times, the first in his early twenties. His best day was 311 at Kulin in 1945 and he also shored over 300 at Myroodah, but he regularly shored well over 200 regardless of the type of sheep. In his early days, Tom recalled travelling to Derby by ship before they were transferred to the old trucks known as 'ring pounders'. The seating was two benches back-to-back in the middle of the tray and the roads also left much to be desired.

In later years they rode the trucks all the way from Perth. He recalled they shored over 100,000 at Noonkanbah for a start, then on to De Grey Station, Shaw River, Karratha, Tootra, Yatheroo, and possibly finish on Dirk Hartog Island in time for Christmas. Two or three weeks off, then back into it again in January.

Peter Hobson said 'Tom was never beaten.' In 1945 the great Bob Sawallish of 'Mad Eight' fame (Shearing August 2021) said that 'Gibson was the most promising shearer in the State.' Tom considered one of his best efforts was at Cunderdin where he shored 10,000 in seven weeks. *Continued page 5*



At one stage, Tom was shearing with badly blistered feet which would have halted a lesser person. On another occasion he met a mate for some fishing which he loved to do and held up his broken thumb in plaster. ‘Still got my 200,’ he told his mate. He was later noticed with a split and raw leg caused by spilling boiling water on it a few days earlier, but he still continued to shear.

Tom Gibson’s sound advice to young shearers was to work hard for ten years, don’t gamble and drink lightly. After this time they should have been able to save enough for a house and some investments. Tom had a big, well-furnished home in Perth he shared with Julia, his wife of 40 years. His son Bill was also a top line shearer in the West. It is believed Tom had several rental properties around Perth in preparation for the time when he could no longer head out to the sheds.

He was of the opinion that ten years shearing is enough for any man as ‘there is no harder work than shearing.’ But a friend of mine, a former dual Australian Open champion once told me, ‘It’s only as hard as you make it – once you are fit to shear it is more busy than hard.’ Perhaps Tom’s quest to shear big numbers every day made it hard for himself.

With more than fifty years on the board and 1.2 million sheep down the chute, Tom was proud of the fact, ‘I never shore a shed I couldn’t go back to’ and he declared that he would ‘probably give it away three days after I die!’

This amazing man who just lived to shear, and whose other great love was fishing, died in 2005 at the great age of ninety- six and is buried at Mt Lawley, in Perth.

I would like to thank Bernie Walker for allowing me to re-publish his article on Tom Gibson in this edition of the SAPWSC News Letter. Bernie writes for a NZ shearing magazine called Shearing www.lastsidepublishing.co.nz This is the link should you wish to have a read. The SAPWSC next edition News Letter will feature an article on the great Bob Sawallish better known as “TheSwallow” and his involvement with the “Mad Eight”.



Joe Roberts Photos

If any one out there knows of Joe Roberts I would like to learn a bit more about him. The association has been given a lot of photos that were taken by Joe. The photos are quite remarkable given the time they were taken and the uniqueness of them. What makes these photos so special is that each photo has the location at which the photo was taken and a brief explanation of the photo written on the back. I will feature a more of the photos in the forthcoming edition of the News Letter.



Loading a dump
Between Point Midland
+
Rochester
W.A.



Old cloths, collected by long at entout
Naukanbah
W.A.
65590

The Round Up

As most of our Members are aware we had to cancel our annual May get together at the Bayswater hotel due to the continued restriction around the ongoing pandemic. However, if anyone has any ideas around catching up in an environment that allows for members to distance appropriately mask free let me know.

I sent a message to Prue Harcourt, Val Hobson's Daughter, to enquire as to Val's health. Unfortunately Prue has not got back to me. As I understand it, Val is uncommunicative at this stage. Val can only communicate via the written word, John Moore has been to see Val and informed Doug Kennedy of Val's current disposition. The SAPWSC would like to take this opportunity to wish our number one ticket holder and life member, Val, all the best. Prue Harcourt's Contact details were distributed in the last news Letter if anyone would like to contact Prue personally.

I received a call from Ken Woods a couple of weeks ago. We had a great chat and I am pleased to say that Ken is doing really well. For those that are unaware Ken was diagnosed with throat cancer last year and underwent surgery on the 7th of October last year. The surgeon was always positive about the outcome. After the operation Ken underwent three months of chemo therapy and has now made a fully recovery.

Memberships Payable

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*SAPWSC Subs
C/O John Williams
150 Moora Rd. Bindoon WA 6502.*

Be Sure to include all your details when paying your subs.

Contacts

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<https://www.shearerswa.com.au>

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