

Roseworthy Agricultural College Archives: Revealing the Wealth

History of Roseworthy Agricultural College

In the mid 1800s there was much discussion in South Australia about establishing a college to teach agriculture. The state's growing population meant there was an urgent need for new plant varieties suited to its climate and soils. Subsequently, in 1879 a motion passed in the House of Assembly to establish a School of Agriculture creating the first college of its type in Australia.

In 1882, John Daniel Custance was appointed the first Professor of Agriculture and an advertisement was placed in *The Advertiser*:

“Farm wanted of several hundred acres within easy distance from any railway station between Smithfield and Roseworthy”.

On the advice of Custance, *Olive Hill Farm* was acquired for the sum of £6 an acre. Despite initial reservations regarding its lack of a permanent water supply, a growing season extending from April to October and the Mediterranean climate made the area ideal for the growing of cereals.

Construction of the College Main Building began in 1883 and the first intake of students was in February 1885. It was noted by ‘*The Observer*’ that

“The Agricultural College was open on Tuesday for the reception of students. There was no formal ceremony, which we think is a matter to be regretted”.



**Roseworthy College
main building 1885**

Series 986 Roseworthy
Agricultural College
Photographs, University
of Adelaide Archives

Despite this unheralded beginning, Professor Custance managed to set extremely high standards in the areas of education, experimental work and research. It was this high level of academic standard that resulted in the first formal affiliation between the College and the University of Adelaide in 1905. Roseworthy subjects in Agriculture, Viticulture and Oenology along with associated practical work were included as part of the University's Bachelor of Science degree.

Despite the difficulties of drought, the Great Depression and a resulting decline in student numbers, the College managed over succeeding years to continue to enhance and strengthen its position as an important institution for research and education. Its cereal plant breeding and animal research received national recognition and significant advancements were made with reference to farm, livestock, dairy, sheep and horse management.

After the appointment of Allan Callaghan as Principal in 1932, the College reaffirmed its role as a training centre for agricultural technologists and the relationship with the University strengthened. Roseworthy graduates could complete the Bachelor of Agricultural Science in three years instead of four and University students spent the second year of their course at Roseworthy to get practical experience.

Australia's first Diploma in Oenology was established at Roseworthy in 1936 and the success of that course and its graduates generated much esteem for the College.

In 1974, Roseworthy became a College of Advanced Education and experienced another period of growth with a significant increase in student and staff numbers. New programs in wine marketing, farm management, agricultural husbandry and natural resources were added to supplement the traditional areas of teaching and research in agriculture and oenology for which the College was renown.

Despite its impressive reputation as a leader in agricultural teaching, Roseworthy was struggling financially in 1988 and discussions between the College and University commenced regarding a formal amalgamation of the institutions. This was seen as a means to strengthen and focus the resources available for agricultural research and teaching. In 1991 the College merged with the University and is now the Roseworthy Campus.

The Records of Roseworthy Agricultural College

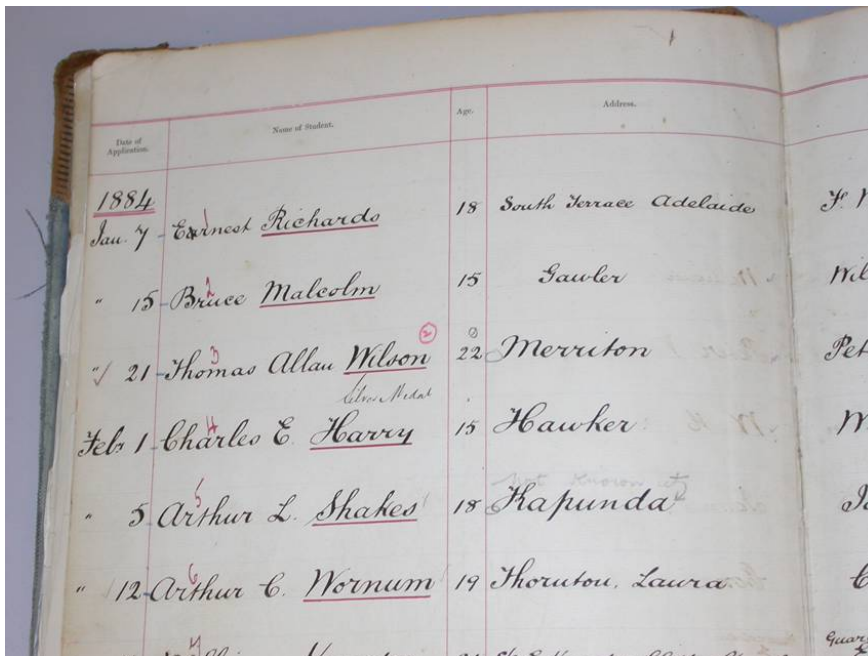
Typical of an institution over 130 years old, the records of Roseworthy College are extensive, but often incomplete. The University of Adelaide Archives has taken responsibility for their management, including the provision of access to

researchers. A recent project to tidy up various accumulations of records from around the campus has resulted in a total of 116 records series with the provenance of Roseworthy Agricultural College.

The University receives many requests for information regarding Roseworthy, especially from graduates and family historians. More recently, the records have been accessed by professional historians and architects who have been undertaking conservation studies of the heritage listed buildings on the site.

The main 'treasures' of the collection include:

- The Roseworthy Council Minutes which record all high level decision making from 1932 until the College's merger with the University of Adelaide in 1991.
- The College Student Register from 1884 to 1974 that lists student names along with date of birth, parent's name occupation and address, date of entry and departure, details of scholarships, exam results, award conferred and other remarks.
- Student files include correspondence with parents ranging from initial enquiries about courses to notification of final results. There are also telling stories of financial hardship and the occasional report on bad behavior.
- The collection of photographs ranges across the entire history of the College, and includes formal group photographs of students and sports teams to more irreverent snapshots of college activities.



Student register
Roseworthy
Agricultural
Photographs,
University of
Adelaide Archives

- Subject Handbooks, mostly from the 1970s, 80s and 90s, provide a complete picture of the academic work undertaken by the College.
- College publications include annual reports and an almost complete run of Student magazines from the 1920s to the 1980s. These are similar to a year book and contain comprehensive information about all College activities.

Other items provide a more intimate view of day to day life and activities at the College and include records that document farm activities including field diaries, produce and livestock books, and paddock grazing and crop yield records. There is also a comprehensive set of meteorological records from 1883 to 1987.

Representing extracurricular activities, there are series of minutes and papers from various sporting groups including the Sports Union, Athletics, Swimming and Rifle Clubs, as well as other groups including the Student Council and Staff Club.

1906 Cricket team

Series 986 Roseworthy Agricultural College Photographs, University of Adelaide Archives

Donations from former students or their families have resulted in personal items such as lecture notes, photograph albums and ephemera such as uniforms and trophies being included in the collection.



Together these form a fascinating and information-rich repository of primary source material for the benefit of researchers.

Over several years the Archives has received valuable assistance from the Roseworthy Old Collegians Association. This very active and supportive alumni group has always retained a keen interest in the preservation of College history and heritage. When a University Archives volunteer group was formed four years

ago, ROCA members were keen to assist and a separate sub-group was formed to work specifically on Roseworthy records.

This has resulted in many significant outcomes including

- creation of the first ever fully comprehensive graduates list;
- a huge collection of photographs sorted, identified, listed and rehoused;
- development of a series of information sheets on the annual winners of the ROCA award of merit;
- sorting, listing and rehousing of newspaper cuttings;
- a comprehensive staff list;
- commencement of an index to the 'Student' magazine; and
- listing of student files

The University of Adelaide is proud of its links to Roseworthy College and the community of staff, students and alumni who continue to hold that institution in high regard and with deep affection.

However, the relationship between the University and Roseworthy alumni has not always been a happy one. There was considerable distress caused by the relocation of the winery, the removal of the vineyard and the associated academic faculty to the Waite Campus after the 1991 merger. And there remains a sense for many that Roseworthy is being neglected when compared to the development at Waite. An announcement earlier this year that a Bachelor of Veterinary Science is to be established at Roseworthy has helped to alleviate some of these fears. The campus now appears to be entering into another new and promising stage.

While the University Archives facilitates use of College records by providing researchers with listings, reference aids and access, it has also played a role in fostering good relations with the Roseworthy community by its ongoing care and promotion of the records of the College. The success of Roseworthy has resulted in prosperity for South Australian agriculture and the national economy, and it has left a wealth of records that document the many achievements of this illustrious institution.

**Main building
Roseworthy Agricultural
College**

Roseworthy Agricultural
College Photographs,
University of Adelaide
Archives



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