

History...From the Group Up
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BEFORE THE BARWELL BOYS
Elspeth Grant

Abstract:

Recent reports about the Barwell Boys in the media have reignited interest in this South Australian youth migration scheme of the 1920s. But did you know that a number of British Boys also emigrated to SA before the First World War to become farm apprentices? Discover how SA was a pioneer of youth migration to Australia, alongside the better-known Fairbridge Farm School and Dreadnought Trust programmes. Hear how the boys who were sent to Yorke Peninsula in 1913-14 fared on their farms, during the First World War, and beyond.

Author:

Elspeth is a great-granddaughter of Lewis Grant, who migrated to SA in 1914 to participate in the State Government's farm apprenticeship scheme. Elspeth researched the scheme for her History Honours thesis at the University of Adelaide in 2007 and continues to pursue the topic through her website www.safarmapprentices.net She was a summer research scholar at the Australian War Memorial in 2008 and was appointed as the Manager/Curator of Ayers House by the National Trust earlier this year.

Note:

These speech notes do not contain references. Please contact me at elspeth_g@hotmail.com if you wish to query any of my sources.

Searching for a "Barwell" boy

REPORT BY: **Katie Langford**

The YP Country Times recently had an interesting email from a Trevor Skingle of Brixton, London, who's been researching the life of his grandfather's brother, George Francis Skingle, who was employed as a farm hand in Minlaton and Naaburra in the 1920s. Trevor had discovered his father's uncle had come to Australia as part of the "Barwell Scheme", introduced in 1923 by then Premier of South Australia H. N. Barwell, to recruit young English boys to fill farming vacancies. An interesting story evolved, and includes George's mysterious disappearance in 1925.



The "Barwell Scheme"

The "Barwell Scheme" began in 1923 as a result of Premier H. N. Barwell of South Australia wanting to recruit young English boys for apprenticeship to South Australian farmers to replace the 6,000 South Australians killed in the war. The boy immigrant

■ George Francis Skingle—missing since 1925 within 48 hours of arriving the boys were dispatched to farmers throughout rural South Australia. George Francis Skingle was placed with

The only lead that authorities had in tracing George was another "Barwell Boy" with whom he had been friends, Richard Ernest Charles Markall

George Francis Skingle, the young man pictured here, was a Barwell Boy. He was one of approximately 1,500 British youths aged 15 to 19 who emigrated to South Australia in the 1920s, to undertake a three-year apprenticeship on one of the state's farms. When Trevor Skingle emailed the *Yorke Peninsula Country Times* from London last year, seeking information about his great-uncle George, he unwittingly reignited interest in the Barwell Boys. The *Country Times* received many letters from people across the state who recalled or are descendants of a Barwell Boy, culminating in my favourite headline 'Bernie Vince's great-grandpa – another Barwell Boy'.

Bernie Vince's great-grandpa — another Barwell Boy

Adelaide Crows footballer, and Stansbury native, Bernie Vince is named after his great-grandfather, Bernard Harry Vince, who was a Barwell Boy.



■ Bernard Vince, great-grandfather of Adelaide Crows player Bernie Vince, was a Barwell Boy.

moely known as "Pom", enlisted in the Barwell Scheme at age 15 and departed England on December 14, 1922, on the SS Bairnald — the same boat as our first Barwell Boy, George Francis Skingle (see YPT 26-28). Pom's original placement was on the farm of Tom Farley at Robertstown in the Mid North but after three years he was relocated to Vic Fleitler's farm at Stansbury. After leaving the Fleitlers, Pom had a stint doing "piece work" for the lime kiln cutting wood and picking rocks. He also worked in the South Australian Farmers Union butter factory in Stansbury where he drove one of five cream lorries, picking up cream and eggs from farmers across Yorke Peninsula. At age 20, he married Doris Amy Jolly, of Stansbury, and became the brother-in-law of another Barwell Boy, Francis Albert Evans (Frank), who was married to Doris's sister, Madge Jolly. Pom and Doris had two children — Roger Charles and Marlene Joy (Farrow). A keen fisherman, Pom obtained his fishing licence and continued to fish well into his retirement years. At age 75, Pom sold his fishing licence and used the money to return to England for the first time since arriving as a Barwell Boy. He was delighted to get together with his older sister, whom he thought would no longer be alive, and also his younger brother who was just 2 years old when Pom first left London back in 1922. Pom passed away at the Minlaton nursing home in 1994 at age 86. Katie Langford



Stories about the Barwell Boys soon followed on the ABC's *Landline* and *Behind the News* TV shows and ABC radio's *Country Hour*. The publicity seems to have led to a large increase in the number of descendants who attended this year's annual Barwell Boys reunion, despite the last Barwell Boy, Harold Marlow, passing away last year at age 101.

It seems that many South Australians, particularly those from a rural background and our older generations, are familiar with the Barwell Boys, and rightly so. They are an important feature of South Australian interwar history, a time at which Premier Sir Henry Barwell was seeking to 'restock' the state after the shocking loss of young lives in the First World War. While 1,500 Barwell Boys arrived, Sir Henry was in fact aiming to recruit 6,000. They are usually purported to be the State's first foray into assisted migration for juveniles. For example, the Barwell Boys are featured in the SA Migration Museum, where the scheme is described as "the first government guardianship of young immigrants" in South Australia.

However, there was an earlier group of arrivals who are also worthy of attention. 172 British boys arrived just *before* the First World War to participate in a South Australian Government farm apprenticeship scheme. The photos taken upon their arrival are on the walls. The scheme was administered by Immigration Minister Frederick Young, under Premier Archibald Peake, and it formed the basis of the later Barwell Boys programme.

It is not clear why this earlier group seems to have largely escaped the historians' attention. It appears that Premier Barwell was keen for people to consider the British farm apprentice scheme his idea. Former Premier Peake died in 1920, so he was not there to argue. Other members of parliament who had served since before the War mildly protested but to no avail. For example, Hansard records the following exchange between Members of Legislative Council, William Morrow and Robert Melrose, in 1924:

Morrow: I prefer not to use a term which is misleading. It may sound beautiful in its alliteration, but it is not true to the scheme itself.

Melrose: What do you mean by that?

Morrow: I mean that the name of Barwell has no more right to be associated with that scheme than the name of Young, and perhaps not so much.

Melrose: Call it what you like, that is what it is known as.

Morrow: I prefer to give it the true term – the British boy-migrant scheme, because it is nothing more than that ... Because of the term with which it has been saddled, it has been presumed that this scheme was the first originated in South Australia, and that the present Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, Sir Henry Barwell, was the one who initiated the scheme. Both statements are incorrect ... The scheme we adopted was actually evolved in the 1912 or 13 ... by Sir Frederick Young ... The name of Barwell has undoubtedly been

associated with the scheme for political purposes, [and] the prominence given to it by Sir Henry ... naturally justified in the minds of some his association with it ... I would rather, however, that this motion was debated from the standpoint of the British boy-migrant scheme than the standpoint of the Barwell Boys Scheme.

The Chief Secretary: It does not matter very much.

And indeed, I'm not here today to argue that Barwell Boys is a misnomer. Rather I want to make the point that even at the time, the name contributed to amnesia about the Barwell Boys' predecessors. I also assert that it allowed the boys who emigrated in the 1920s to proudly adopt the farm apprentice scheme as part of their identity. Most Barwell Boys, and now their descendants, wear the title as a badge of honour, whereas the collective identity of the earlier group was less strongly felt. At an individual level I suspect a man's affiliation with the pre-War farm apprenticeship scheme was probably replaced by his association with a particular unit from the First World War. Also, while some of the Barwell Boys continued to work for their host farmer, or at least in the same district, for years after their apprenticeship ended, most of the earlier group had their contracts cut short by enlistment. Although most of these soldiers returned to South Australia after the War ended, very few went back to their former homes.

So why do I consider it important to recognise that there was a group of British farm apprentices who arrived in South Australia before the Barwell Boys? First, I want to make it clear that for me it is not a case of 'ha ha – someone beat you to it!' In terms of size, the earlier group of 172 boys hardly compares to the 1,500-odd Barwell Boys. But I admit I wish to stop references to the Barwell Boys being the 'first', simply because they are historically incorrect.

More importantly, I believe the earlier group deserve our attention for two key reasons: one, for their significance in the study of juvenile migration across the globe; and two, the way in which the First World War affected this group of apprentices.



Juvenile migration involved the systematic movement of unaccompanied children and youths, usually from Britain, to its Dominions, including Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Rhodesia. It was conducted by both governments and philanthropic organisations. The main destinations were Canada during the 19th century and Australia in the 20th. For reasons that I won't go into here, academic research into juvenile migration has proliferated since the late 1980s. To date priority has been given to researching child migrants, that is, those generally under the age of 15, mainly due to the ethical concerns. Whereas most youth migrants, those aged approximately 15 to 19 years, gave their consent to migrate, some children were taken without parental consent and suffered horrific abuse after their arrival. So far research has also focussed on post-World War I child migration, as the participants were or are still with us to provide first-hand testimonies. This has been integral in exposing the 'unofficial' history of juvenile migration and seeking redress for those who were harmed. Now that there have been government inquiries and apologies, the older youth migrants and pre-World War I migrants, are starting to receive greater attention.

More research needs to be done to answer the intriguing question of why Australia began participating in juvenile migration at the approximately the same time that Canada was scaling back its involvement due to ethical concerns. Geoffrey Sherrington and Alan Gill have studied two long-lived and, consequently, relatively well-known Australian juvenile migration schemes that were founded in the early 1910s: the Dreadnought Trust from New South Wales, which later evolved into the Big Brother Movement; and the Fairbridge Farm School Scheme which began in Western Australia. Dreadnought and Fairbridge were contemporaries of the inaugural South Australian farm apprenticeship scheme, as were other programmes in Victoria and Queensland about which, to the best of my knowledge, almost no research exists. South Australia appears to have established the first government-administered juvenile migration scheme in Australia. While the 1920s saw a significant expansion in the number of youth migrants arriving in Australia, I believe much could be gained by examining the origins of the phenomenon and comparing the various early schemes.



I am also conducting further research into the influential role of Thomas Sedgwick in juvenile migration at this time. London-based Sedgwick had a two-fold and complementary passion for (a) securing long-term careers for boys employed in dead-end jobs in Britain's industrial cities; and (b) an imperial desire to get white men on the land in the wide open spaces of the colonies. After his concerted lobbying, it was Sedgwick's model of farm apprenticeship that was adopted by the South Australian Government for both the pre-War and Barwell Boy schemes. Sedgwick also assisted groups of boys to emigrate to New Zealand and Canada before the War and was employed as a superintendent to escort numerous youth migrants on ships to Australia during the 1920s, including the first contingent of Little Brothers to arrive in Victoria. If anything, perhaps South Australia's farm apprentices should have been christened 'Sedgwick Boys', as the New Zealand boys were. Sedgwick is a figure deserving of more study and the groups he sponsored provide an avenue for comparing juvenile migration practices applied in various countries in the early 20th century.

With regard to my other point, it is important to recognise that South Australia's 1913 and 14 British farm apprentices and the Barwell Boys of the 1920s are from generations divided by a war. Approximately 75% of the 1913 and 14 apprentices enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force for wartime service and sadly 18 of these men died.

Lest We Forget



William George
CHASTEAUNEUF



Eric James
JARRETT

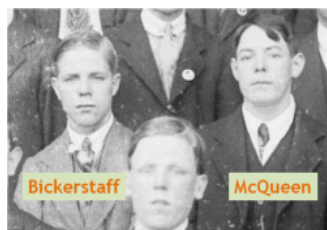


Walter
WAINWRIGHT

Charles Frederick John AKEHURST
Cecil Raymond Abbey BRANGWIN
Archibald Menzies CAMERON
Andrew Brand CURD
Arthur FLOATE
John FORREST
Richard Leander GAY

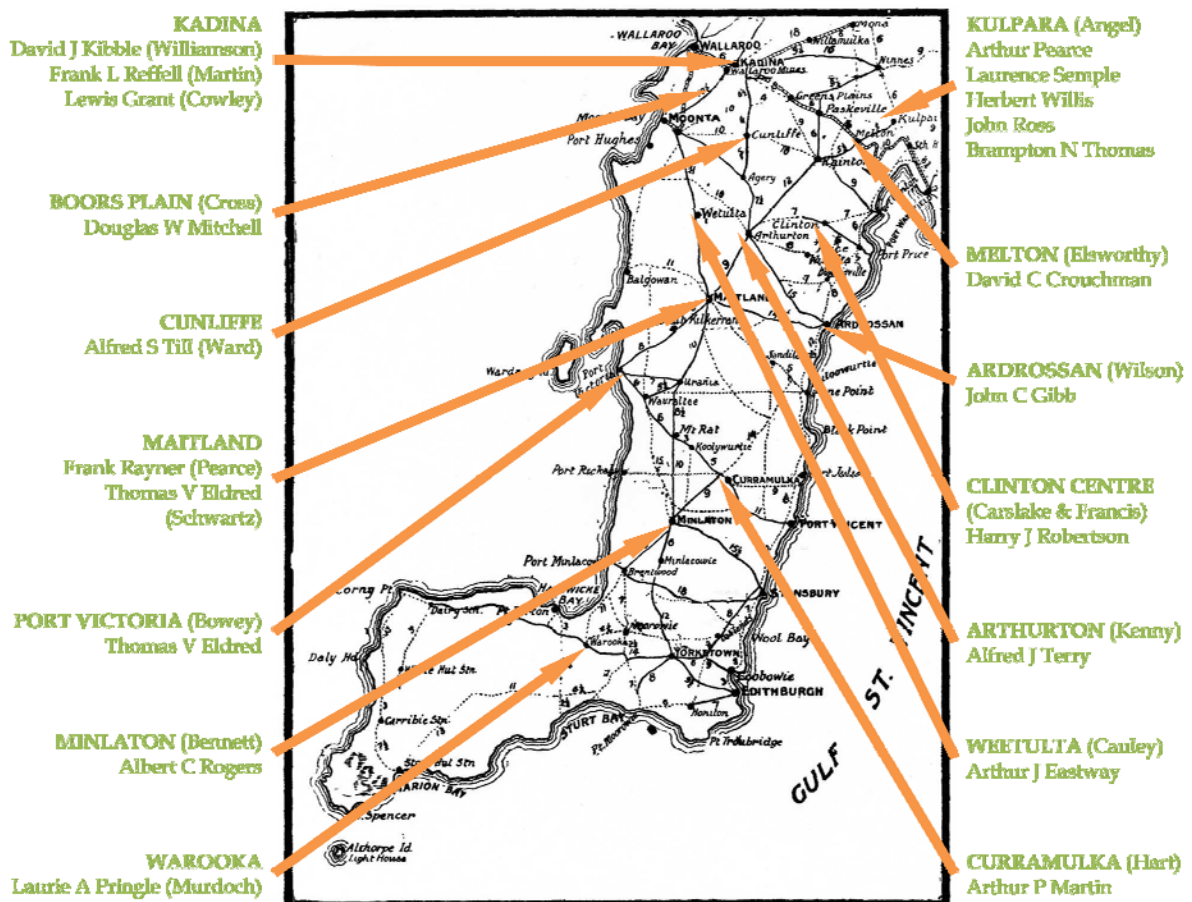
Ernest Albert GREEN
William HAMILTON
Arthur Percy MARTIN
Albert Charles ROGERS
John SCOTT
Laurence SEMPLE
Alexander Galbraith SIMPSON
Percy William VERRELL

It is practically impossible to compare the ultimate success or failure of the two schemes because the 1913 and 14 scheme was cut short by the War. The fourth shipment of apprentices arrived on 11 July 1914 and plans for a fifth shipment were immediately cancelled when War was declared on 5 August. The State Government permitted apprentices to break their agreements in order to enlist, provided they were of age. These soldiers would form an interesting case study for historians who wish to challenge the Anzac myth. It has been estimated that 1 in 4 AIF soldiers were born in Britain but it is not known how many were recent arrivals in Australia. When studying the enlisted apprentices I have found that many show what some purport to be unique traits of a digger, even though some had been living in Australia for less than a year. For example, these two apprentices, soldiers and mates, Joseph McQueen and George Bickerstaff, were identified as the anti-establishment ringleaders of a famous riot in Heliopolis, Egypt, in July 1915.



I hope I have convinced you that these apprentices are worthy of historians' attention in terms of their place in juvenile migration history and military history, and independently of the need to recognise them as predecessors to the Barwell Boys.

Being conscious that our blood sugar levels are plummeting as we approach lunch, in conclusion, I promised in my abstract that I would share some stories of the farm apprentices who were sent to Yorke Peninsula in 1913 and 14. This map, which I've based on a motoring guide from 1915, shows where these 20 apprentices were sent. Their host farmers' surnames are in brackets – I hope some of the locals here recognise a name or two.



I am sorry to inform you that three of the apprentices who were sent to Yorke Peninsula died during the War. They are Laurence Semple, who was hosted by AJ Angel at Kulpara, Albert Charles Rogers, from Joseph Bennett's at Minlaton, and Arthur Percy Martin from ME Hart's at Curramulka. Rogers is commemorated on the Minlaton War Memorial and both Rogers and Martin are listed on the South Australian War Memorial in Adelaide. Semple did not last very long on his farm and went to live with an aunty at Bundaberg in Queensland. That's why you will find him listed on the Bundaberg

War Memorial and not on any South Australian memorials. Overseas, Semple is commemorated on the Menin Gate Memorial, Martin is commemorated on the VC Corner Memorial at Fromelles, and Rogers is buried at Vignacourt British Cemetery on the Somme. There are also several rolls of honour around the Peninsula that acknowledge the service of apprentices who survived.

Just briefly, there are four other names that stand out for me from Yorke Peninsula. First, I have had the pleasure of helping John Reffell from Hastings unravel the story of his relative Frank Reffell, who was placed with DN Martin at Pittenween, SW of Kadina. Frank was illegitimate and had a tough childhood. Prior to emigration he attended the Chertsey School of Handicrafts for destitute boys.



Frank was able to participate in the farm apprenticeship scheme with financial assistance from the Kent Colonising Association. This Association was founded following a successful public subscription to assist Kentish folk to emigrate to the colonies – an indication of how insidious imperial migration was at this time. As far as well can tell, Frank did not serve in the AIF or home militia. He died of cancer not far away in Port Pirie at the young age of 36. We do not know much more other than that he was still single when he passed away.

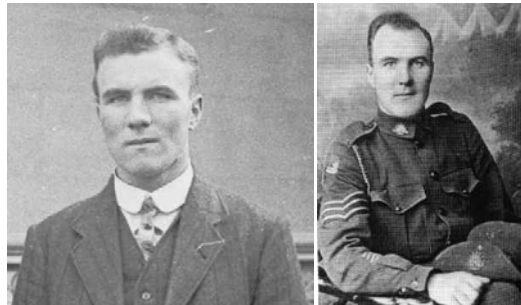
Frank Rayner of Tunbridge Wells was also assisted by the Kent Colonising Association. He was placed with Francis Thomas Pearce at 'Olivigne', adjacent to Maitland. Descendants of the Pearces still live at 'Olivigne' and I am pleased to welcome two of them, Dianne and Adrian Morgan here today. The Morgans have kindly provided me with information about the farmer and farm.



FT Pearce was a community leader and I am finding this is true of many of the host farmers. The apprenticeship scheme was promoted by the Government through the Agricultural Bureaus, and in turn, the Ag Bureaus at this time generally consisted of the longest-settled farmers – often the

district's pioneers. Frank expressed satisfaction with Olivigne from day one and is one of only two apprentices I know of that returned to his host farm after the War. Incidentally, the other was Frank's mate Charles Wimshurst, whose daughter still lives in the South East.

Another noteworthy apprentice, who was not hosted on Yorke Peninsula, is George Kirkhope McPhail.



George was sent to Port Macdonnell and after he returned from the War he somehow met, and later married, Fern, daughter of CH Smith of stump jump plough fame. George and Fern were married in Yorketown and lived in Ardrossan for a time. I presume George was employed by Smith, as he considered himself an engineer. Fern was a talented artist and her portrait of her father hangs in the Ardrossan Museum.



I have had the pleasure of meeting their daughter Judith and other family members. He might not have become a farmer in the long term but George certainly married into South Australian agricultural royalty!

Finally, there was a boy who attended the same reformatory school in Scotland as Laurence Semple and George McPhail who is worth a mention.



Lewis Grant was sent to J Cowley's farm, 'AlbionFields', at Wintanerta, a railway siding a few miles NE of here. It was a pleasant surprise to meet members of the Cowley family who are attending the conference this morning. Lewis did not recount much about his time there other than picking rocks, which is, after all, a favourite Yorke Peninsula pastime. He claimed the outbreak of the war saved him from this task. Along with more than 1,100 other Australian soldiers, he became a prisoner of war at the First Battle of Bullecourt on 11 April 1917. Lewis married Minnie Higgins when he returned to Australia and had ten children, all of whom are all still with us today.



And I am proud to say he was my great-grandfather.