

Clare Newbey nee Holm

Part One

Life at Kwobrup c1912-c1921

Clara (known as Clare) Monica Martha Newbey nee Holm was born on 11 October 1905 at her parent's residence at 12 Smythe Road in Subiaco. Her father Albert Helga Holm (1866-1941) was born at Bornholm Island in Denmark and was orphaned at the age of 12. He was attending college but decided to run away and see the world. Albert stowed away in Copenhagen, soon becoming a cabin boy. He travelled widely throughout Europe, the West Indies, East Indies and to African ports. He sailed on the well known ship the "*Cutty Sark*" for a time.

Eventually he tired of sailing the seas and 'jumped ship' in Melbourne. He wandered around taking up various types of employment, arriving in Coolgardie at the height of the gold rush. He worked as a woodcutter on the famous '*Woodline*'. He also prospected for gold without luck.

Albert arrived in Perth where he was working at a lime kiln in the Swanbourne area, as well as working as a 'night man' or sanitary worker.

Clare's mother, Elizabeth Anna nee Stook (1881-) was born in South Australia. Both of her parents and a brother died during an epidemic. The remaining three brothers and four sisters were split up – the boys (Will, Arthur and Alf) sent to work and the girls (Flo, Nell and Clare) were cared for by grandparents. The grandparents found they could not manage and they went into an orphanage. Clare was adopted aged 4. All of her siblings survived and lived long lives.

Elizabeth and Albert most likely met in the Subiaco area where Elizabeth lived and Albert was working. They were married on Christmas Eve in 1904. Clare was born in October 1905, her brother Arthur was born c1907 and younger brother Lou c1910.

At that time 'The government was urging men to go on the land and opening up the country at a cheap price.' (Clare) Her father 'wanted to own more than a house and be his own boss.' About 1913 when Clare was aged eight, Clare's parents sold the family home and furniture to buy a thousand-acre virgin bush block at South Kwobrup (about 17 miles/27 kilometres). Albert named the property 'Quondong Plains'. They also purchased a team of horses, a plough, stripper and winnower.

Albert left 12 months or so before the rest of the family joined him. They stayed with an uncle and aunt in Spearwood. Albert kept busy clearing the land and also built a humpy in the middle of a clearing. Constructed from bush timber and corrugated iron, it had a mud floor and no doors or windows when the family first saw their new home. There were two rows of timber posts with hessian nailed up. Later her father built up the walls with two rows of moort sticks with mud filling. Elizabeth whitewashed the hessian inside. Elizabeth had kept her much loved piano, however that was later sold to buy some more team horses which upset her very much. They later purchased a Metters No. 2 stove. A copper was built in outside, and along with a bench and tubs this was the laundry. Clare commented she used the same

system herself for many years.

The isolation of the country was a stark contrast to their previous life in the city. Her mother was 'rather upset' that there were no doors or windows but the children were 'very excited'. Albert fitted the doors and windows very soon after the family arrived.

Albert cleared the property himself. The moort and silver mallet was cleared by axe, the lighter country with a roller made from a log. The family also collected the bark from the mallet trees.

Kangaroos and dingoes abounded in those early years. At first the children were very frightened of the dingoes and their father patiently helped them overcome their fears. After a time they became adept at imitating the howl, and one night Clare was able to call one up close.

Their closest neighbours – two bachelors – lived just half a mile away. However for five years they did not attend school - it was ten miles to the Kwobrup School over a winding track – sandy in summer and mud in winter.

Although correspondence lessons were available at the time, the family chose instead to send the children for two hours every day to Mr Reeve's house for lessons given by Mrs Gray. When the neighbours moved to Gnowangerup there were no more lessons. Mrs Holm was very upset because they had been promised schooling and there were plenty of children in the area. (One family had ten children).

Occasionally the family went into Gnowangerup for stores or blacksmithing repairs in their spring cart or horse and dray. The normal day saw Clare working with her father from 8am until 12 noon.

The farm was on 'virgin country' and the family cleared the lighter country mostly by the 'rolling' method. A roller was made out of a huge log, a frame was built around it and it was pulled by four horses. The heavier country consisting of silver mallet and moort was all felled by axe and later burnt. Often the mallet bark was stripped, bundled and sold for an extra income. At that time agents in Gnowangerup purchased the mallet bark and sent it by rail to be shipped overseas. Clare could cook a meal, including bread, biscuits and cakes by the age of 10. She always loved horses and often worked with her father – Clare drove the horses whilst her father picked mallee roots ahead of the team and the combine or plough. Clare can recall only one paddock that was cropped using a stripper and winnower. The first crop was harvested just before Christmas and heaped into piles of wheat grain and chaff. That night a thunderstorm came up and the crop was lost to the soggy clay pan.

An aunt in South Australia sent over dresses which were 'cut down' and altered by a kind neighbour. For much of her first year at school Clare attended in bare feet, keeping her only footwear – a pair of black button-up boots for special occasions. When she was 12 her teacher took her and her brother by train to Perth, delivering them to a relative for two weeks holiday. Clare was able to buy some fuji silk and a dressmaker came to make two coat-frocks – her first

experience of new clothing. There was enough money to purchase a pair of white patterned stockings and a pair of black patent shoes.

About 1917 when the railway was being put through the area, a fettling gang was working at Kwobrup siding. One of the women accompanying the fettlers agreed to take Clare and her brother to the Kwobrup State School Monday to Friday. There was usually between 17 and 20 children including Clare and her siblings attending. The school was housed in a one-roomed weatherboard hall with a tin roof. The hall was also used for social functions such as dances and church services.

This was their first experience of school. Clare was academically behind and in another school may have been placed with Standard two children aged around 7 years old. However, the teacher put her with her age group – which happened to have a group of ‘four big boys’. The teacher was Miss Effie Montgomery, who married local farmer Ernie Needham. Clare recalls that she later would meet Mrs Needham in the street in Katanning, and that the couple had been ‘very, very good to me’.



Sister Wright, Vin McDonald and Phyllis Flanagan nee Sclater



Vin and Connie McDonald

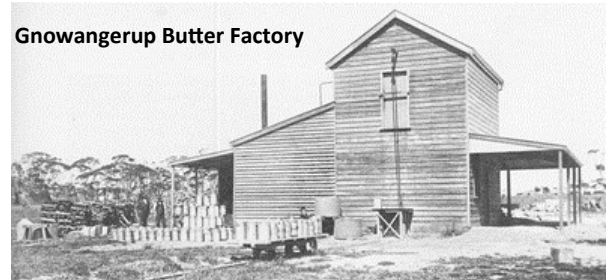
At first Clare was anxious when it was her turn to read in front of the class for fear of being teased. However, her father, a well educated man, had insisted Clare read to him every night from a newspaper or book. ‘He said if I learned to read and spell I could always keep up with the rest of the world’ and she ‘sailed straight through it.’ Clare did have trouble with spelling but, forgoing her play time, stayed in over the lunch hour and practised. The following year her father could spare ‘Jimmy’ one of the team horses. Clare drove her siblings in the spring cart the ten miles with each way to school. They would leave at 6.30am and were never late for

school, earning a commendation from the School Inspector, Mr. Gladman. The children used pencil or pen and ink, one of the subjects being copybook writing.

Clare began collecting for the Silver Chain and wrote letters to ‘Aunt Mary’ at the Western Mail. Several of these letters were published. Some of the comments she made gave an interesting insight into life at Kwobrup. Excerpts from letters include: *“Every morning we see lots of kangaroos....we have about sixty fowls...(and have)...sold some turkeys...we have 260 acres in...the crops are looking splendid....we have finished building our haystack....my pet lamb died he got poison and had too much....we had a lot of turkeys but they all died....there have been a terrible lot of bush fires.....we have got three little calves...their names are Billie, Pat and Rosie....we have got a garden at school and it is coming on splendidly....a lot of lambs are dying this year, and the dingoes are troublesome....There was a picnic at Kwobrup not long ago, and it was a splendid success. In one of the horse events there was musical chairs and as they could not get chairs boxes were used...The teacher at Kwobrup school played bagpipes for music.... I went to the Katanning Show last month and I enjoyed myself. There was a circus at night and it was very good – I like to watch the horses performing. The clowns were so funny. We have a clutch of chickens out. Mum set a hen with Muscovy duck eggs, only two came out and they both died.....everyone is praying for rain and as there is not any feed for the stock, all have to cart water. There is to be a social next week...I have been to three concerts at Badgebup lately....”*

Lou also wrote to Aunt Mary *“.....last night one of our neighbours’ horses died of poison.....today we found two opossums, the mother one with her young one. We are going to keep the young one for a pet....We had nine kangaroo snares set. We have caught one kangaroo but we have lost three snares...there are nine children attending the school now....”*

Eight months later, around the beginning of 1918, there were the required 10 children living in the vicinity of their farm, so the local parents erected the South Kwobrup School (9/9/1918-14/7/1921). This was a one school room 12 foot by 15 foot with a veranda on one side. It was built from materials supplied by the Education Department. The parents supplied the 100 gallon water tank. This school was only two miles from their home, so the children usually walked. Their first (and only) teacher at South Kwobrup was Miss Evelyn Young who boarded with the Hills family for one pound a week.



Around 1918 just after the butter factory had opened in Gnowangerup, Albert decided to go into dairying. He bought nine cows from Mr. Bell at *Nightwell* (near Borden). The family milked and separated – taking the cans of cream across the road for the mailman to collect.

The children also did 'sucker bashing' (clearing) and carting water for the horses from the Government dam on the edge of the property. The only other dam was a small one close to their home which went dry early in summer.

The family did not keep sheep, except for orphaned lambs were given to them by a neighbour. The children taught the lambs to play hide and seek. Clare and her siblings dearly wanted to keep pigs, however her father was vehemently against the idea. The children saved their pennies and bought a sow from a neighbour. The children built a little sty from moort saplings, but the sow got out the first night and was running around squealing. The children had to get up and catch it. Their father threatened to kill it but when the children began crying he 'set to and made a proper sty, (with) stronger rails and posts.' The sow went on to have many litters of healthy piglets which over the years brought in a lot of money to the family. The family would put netting over the dray, load up the pigs and take them into the butcher in Gnowangerup. Six of the first litter of eight was sold to Mr. Grocock, the butcher in Gnowangerup for 54 pounds cash. The children made plans on how to spend the money – but their mother told them they could have one pound each to put into their savings but the rest had to go to food for the family. Her father later said it was the best thing the children ever did for the farm.

Next the children bought a pair of turkey hens and a gobbler. The turkeys they bred were sent to Perth and Kalgoorlie markets. The children always saved the money.

They spent one pound each of their own savings at Christmas but had no treats such as lollies during the rest of the year. At Christmas they would buy their mother one or two pairs of black lisle (cotton) stockings and a pretty handkerchief, a pair of socks for their father then spend the rest of the pound on themselves - 'no questions asked'. They would go to J.E. Rowe who had the newsagency and buy comics, books and toys.

On the way home the family would cut down a Christmas tree and decorate the house with the branches. For Christmas dinner they killed the young roosters and their mother made cakes and puddings. The bachelors next door would come for dinner, bringing with them fruit and little presents, perhaps even a Christmas stocking. They also bought the children a bottle of lemonade each – the only soft drink they had all year.

Clare had to leave school at the age of fourteen and a half. In 1919 and 1920 things 'had gone very badly on the farm.' This had come about from one devastating event. The family had an old cow which was too old to milk but was kept as a pet. She had a tendency to go through fences, so Clare's father had put a wooden yoke around her neck, but one night she got tangled in the fence and broke through to feed on the stubble on the other side. This let the team horses and the cows out and the next morning there were four dead horses, four dead cows, two dead calves and some other sick calves. They had all got through into the stubble which had poison in it.

That was the end of the farm. Her parents had no money to replace the horse team and Albert was already in debt to the Industry Assistance Board which was 'closing in on him.'

Her father decided to sell the remaining livestock and start contract clearing around Kwobrup, hoping to keep the farm going. It was hard work, especially for a man of his age, with

the added hardship of having to live in a tent most of the time. The white gum trees would first be ring barked, later chopped down and burnt. A fire would be lit that burned into the trees. In this way the direction of the fall of the tree could be controlled. However, sometimes the wind direction changed which made the task very dangerous. At these times Albert would need to build up these fires until midnight before he could snatch a few minutes sleep. The wages amounted to very little as the farmers who employed him were also struggling to survive. Clare left school and took on a position for a year as home help for a neighbour who had just given birth. Her wages were 10 shillings a week. Although Clare worked hard, she said the family was 'very good' to her. Her mother gave Lou correspondence lessons and they were able to stay on the farm for about another year. The storekeeper at Kwobrup employed Clare's mother. His wife's eyesight was affected by cataracts, nearly blind waiting for an operation. The storekeeper was very kind to Mrs Holm and the other farmers in the district as he knew they 'were having very hard times'

The family were forced to walk off the farm at the end of that year. Clare comments that "all the farms all went, you know. They didn't know how to use the land.' Another prime factor in the failure of these farms - the deficiencies of the soil - was later overcome by the use of superphosphate.

Clare's mother took a position at Katanning as a housekeeper so she could keep her two sons with her. Clare also took on a position in Katanning as a housekeeper to Mr. Harold Piesse. This was a large house and Clare was responsible for assisting with the washing and ironing, cleaning and cooking. Her wages were one pound a week plus keep, and she kept the position for five years.

SOUTH KWOBRUP SCHOOL

Pupils who attended South Kwobrup School included Clara, Arthur and Louis Holm; Roy Hinkley; Kathleen, Mabel and Vincent McDonald; Marjorie Hills and Phyllis Sclater. Later Arthur, Ethel Ruth and Ivy Wise.

It closed in 1921 due to low numbers.

In 1926 an attempt to start another South Kwobrup School but did not come to fruition.

References: Clare Newbey Oral History Battye Library, Information and photos from Moira Jones, Western Argus 11 Feb 1908, Western Mail per trove.nla.gov.au, "Letters to Aunt Mary" (Various).

*Information supplied to Lost Katanning
By Marilyn Stewart.*