



Nov. 5th - 8th 1947

Visitation Report of ~~XXXX~~ BINDOON

COMMUNITY: Br T. McGee (S); Br P. O'Sullivan (S S); Br R. Wextel (B & C); Br C Seery; and coadjutor Brothers A Angas, C. O'Neill, L. Wise. The Superior's specialty is the dairy; Br Peter looks after the sheep, Br Alonzo sees to the machinery and general farm work; Br Lambert assists Br Alonzo; Br Cletus does the trucking and takes charge of the electrical plant; Br Coman teaches school but takes on no supervision; Br Regis attends to the accounts and spends most of the rest of his time on his bed.

Remark: This is one of the most difficult reports I have been faced with. I could only spend three days at Bindoon where weeks would be necessary to assess the position. The arrival of the migrants on the final day did not help. However from what I saw set over against what I heard I feel that something drastic will have to be done to redeem our position there. I have the utmost sympathy for the Superior in his efforts and admiration for his courage in facing terrible odds. He finds himself in an impossible position with mounting debts and no capital. Brs Alonzo, Cletus and Lambert are the only reliable men he has. Br Peter is the best intentioned man in the world but a sheep farm cannot be run on good intentions alone. Br Regis is practically useless but is worse than that in being a constant source of worry to the Superior. Br Coman has no interest in the place and is angling to get out as soon as possible.

Observance: The Superior in his anxiety over the general conditions prevailing has allowed things to slip in the matter of the Exercises. Actually most of the men can be relied on ~~not~~ to omit the daily round of Exercises but that does not excuse the slipshod methods in vogue. Br Peter rises at 5 and the Superior some time before 5.15. They go to the dairy at 6 and are joined by Br Lambert who rises with the Community at 5.30. Generally they are back in time for Mass at 7 but not infrequently they are late. The remaining members are supposed to assemble at 5.45, but as Br Regis will not take charge it is a question of every man for himself. Machines are now installed in the dairy and one Brother and boys should be able to manage. Directions have been given accordingly. The weekly Accusation, the daily and the Sunday Conferences have been omitted. Again directions have been given for the holding of these. The Superior is timid evidently about drawing up time-tables and allotting duties. This holds also in the matter of supervision. The result is that the willing ones are overloaded while the dodgers side-step work. Br Lambert, for example, after a hard day in the fields returns at 5.30 and after a hasty wash has to supervise the boys at tea, then later at recreation and in the dormitory. If Br Coman had sufficient interest he could be of service here. He is partly excused by his indifferent health since his return. It is a pity the Superior has to be so engaged himself. He certainly does not spare himself but the organisation suffers. The ~~presence~~ presence of the Chaplain at table cuts out the long grace. He cannot be accommodated elsewhere. Lecture is read at meals but here again two Brothers' spiritual reading is interfered with by a relief system for the boys' supervision. Some minor points also called for remedy in

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The Migrants: Twenty were in residence on my arrival and 17 more came two days later. The former came out to welcome the new arrivals and the contrast in personal appearance was striking and in the presence of strangers would make you hang your head. When allowance is made for new clothes of the arrivals the change in a few weeks cannot be easily explained away to the inquiring observer. The C.W.D Report enclosed gives a picture of the impression on the Inspector. There will be four more such inspections in the course of the next few weeks. Now who is to blame for this? Certainly not the Superior. Bindoon was never fitted out as a school and was never intended to take boys who should be really under a woman's care. There are boys here from ten to fourteen years. A machine shop had to be cleared out to make a "Classroom" for them. A Brother whom the Inspector knew as the "sheepman" of Bindoon was in charge of a section of them. With the red mud of the district in wet weather and the penetrating red dust in dry it is impossible to keep them even reasonably clean in person or in clothes. They were provided neither in clothes nor in footwear for such conditions. The Superior was obliged to put in an order at Aherns for some hundreds of pounds of materials for these migrants. Mr Ahern is prepared to let it stand over for years, if necessary. Is it fair that we should stand this cost?

The first lot, specially selected for Bindoon, they by Br. Louis are mentally and physically retarded. The second batch appears better. Two of the latter have already approached the Superior to be hired out to farmers. They are 14 & 15 respectively and have come out not from an institution but from their own families. They don't wish to remain in Bindoon, but will probably settle down in a day or two.

The Brothers have found the first lot a very unruly and "cheeky" batch. There is however one very promising boy amongst them. If he had been selected for Tardun his schooling could be attended to. In Bindoon he will probably just drift along. Why the problem of teaching power was made more difficult by scattering the boys of all ages among the four establishments cannot be explained.

Besides the migrants there are three other boys - two subnormal pensioners in the kitchen for whom the sum of £124/15/- is paid by the C.W.D. and one helping Br Cletus. Only four or five of the new comers are of age to work on the farm.

The Farm: Bindoon has to stand or fall on the strength of the sheep farming. So far this has been a dismal failure and this in what everyone considers excellent sheep country. Br Peter knows all there is to be known about sheep but when it comes to putting his knowledge to account he fails. Fences have not been repaired for ages and as one man said when it is necessary to shift the sheep from the clover paddocks they can wander to Perth, Geraldton or Toodyay. The story of sheep in Bindoon is the result: 200 out of a flock brought from Geraldton last year lost and only 50 recovered from a farmer in Toodyay; sheep wandering into the hills and there picking up poison, and so on. This season was the best for years in the district for fat lambs. Those from Bindoon were 6/- a head below the average price



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Trouble has now started with the clover feed, trouble experienced as far away as Victoria. It has beaten the experts up to the present but all agree that it may be overcome in great measure by moving the sheep from the clover during the wet season. Unchanging clover feed is too strong for the ewes, affects them in more ways than one but the chief trouble lies in infertility. Some of the neighbouring ^{FARMERS} have given up ewe breeding and have turned to wethers, combining this with "Baby Bee" industry and some orcharding. The clover once wet does not dry easily and this leads to foot rot. This is where Br Peter failed badly. He has been warned time and again of the trouble ahead but took absolutely no precautions, not even to the extent of arresting the foot-rot trouble so easily attended to in the initial stages. Mr McCallum, the visiting ex-State expert was so disgusted that he told the Superior he would not come to Bindoon again. There is plenty of very good land in the hilly part without clover but with good natural grass requiring only that the fences be attended to or lacking that, a little shepherding, and nothing was done. Apart from Br Peter's physical condition he is too scattered to make a success of the sheep. Even with the present land available and fenced they should be carrying at least 1200. Last year in Br Peter's absence the Superior stepped them up to 1300. Now they are down to under 1000. Killing is constantly thinning them out but Br Peter does not bother about replacements. Although they shear nearly 1000 sheep the return will be poor. Late rains and inability to keep the sheep dry brought about a protracted shearing period with poor results.

Br Alonzo is clearing good hilly land for sheep runs. Br Lambert, who understands the work sufficiently well to substitute for Br Peter under the direction of Mr McCallum who was persuaded to continue his visits on the promise that a change would be made, is now on the fencing work. If good returns do not come from this then we must endeavour to find a trustworthy manager to take over, perhaps on a commission basis. There are magnificent properties not far from Bindoon run on excellent lines by managers.

The dairy, the Baby Beef venture and the vines or citrus fruits can be considered only as side lines, made to pay if the danger of too wide a spread of pursuits is avoided. The old blind circuit work without any attempt at long-range planning will never bring anything like success. Vines have been planted more than once only to be eaten out by rabbits or trampled down by stock. I have been told that the sheep, cattle or pigs were deliberately turned in on the vines and citrus trees (120 of the latter had been specially selected by a friend of the Brothers and given as a start. No more are likely to follow as not a single tree remains). A neighbour can boast of having paid £8000 income tax on his orchard returns of last year!

Bindoon can be and I feel sure will be made a great dividend returner, but not under the methods pursued up to the present. The present Superior has youth, energy and enthusiasm and an interest that came with him from his own upbringing, but he has a mill-stone of debt strangling him, and by no means an efficient staff to help him out. If we can come to his assistance I think he will make good.



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REDACTED

's Case:

REDACTED

interviewed me about his position on the old home stead property. At present he is staying in the home and working about ten acres of vines. He has stayed on in the hope that promises made to him from Br Keaney's time down of his being settled on the land to the extent of being given on the strength, he says, of Br Paul's promise of 1200 acres down to 125 acres promised later. He gave up a job he had taken in Carnarvon after leaving Tardun at Br Paul's invitation. He is 22 years now and is asking that the promise be redeemed. He wants to settle down but can do nothing until he has the deeds. I listened to his story and promised that the matter would be gone into at once and that he would probably hear the result within the next few weeks.

Opinions on RED's prospects of success as a farm farmer differ among the Brothers. Some consider him a good worker but the Superior thinks him on the lazy side. He is keeping company with a non-Catholic girl and has not been attending his duties on Sunday lately. This is strange as he was always considered a very good Catholic lad.

Premises: Much has been done to brighten up the drabness of the interior, especially the living quarters of the Brothers. The refectory arrangements which used to be so primitive are now very satisfactory. The Community Room is also respectable. The patience of the Superior is severely tried in this regard by Br Regis. He has the run of the place and is provided with at times new blankets to sleep on. He crunches his bones on the line and follows him into Brothers' refectory. The new furniture was scarcely a couple of weeks in the C. Room when a chair was burned through by Br R. A fine set of English Classics had wet ashes thrown over them. Br Regis insists on taking charge of the Sacristy. A more deplorable condition of things one could not imagine. The oil container has been allowed to run all over the place. A new Altar cover got from the Good Shepherd nuns is ruined. When he spills oil, almost a daily occurrence, he rushes to the kitchen for a tea-towel to wipe it up and then throws the latter away. The matron is driven frantic with him. The Superior hesitates to remonstrate with him on account of his mental state. In one part of the Annals he wandered off into incoherencies and then scratched it out. Pointing to it he said to me: "I don't know what happened me there. I hate looking at it." The impression I got was that although his normal mental state has improved he has some bad lapses.

Very little has been done with the central block. It might be wise not to try to rush the completion of this but to give attention to more important things. The S. thinks the St Joseph Sisters could be got for the asking. Should sanction be given a building would have to be got ready - perhaps the "Laundry" could be reconditioned. Other items: Completion of Showers, Slaughter House, Wool Shed, Stables, Harness Room and Garage. The new dairy is almost complete.

FINANCE: The Statement on the following page is worse than it appears. Because of a mistake by Elder Smith's in forwarding a cheque instead of a credit note the "cash in bank" item disappears.