Mr. Hugh Gunn.

In 1911 a number of prominent West Australians were in London for the Coronation. Sir Newton Moore, who was then Agent-General for Western Australia, called a meeting of those interested in the proposed West Australian University. Although Sir Newton was the convener the action was undoubtedly instigated by Sir Winthrop Hackett. The gentlemen present were Mr. Frank Wilson, the then Premier of Western Australia, who was appointed Chairman; Sir Newton Moore; Mr. Andrews, Inspector General of West Australian schools; Mr. Cyril Jackson, a former Inspector General; the Rev. Riley, Bishop of Perth; and, of course, Sir Winthrop. It was undoubtedly a very influential committee.

The date of this meeting is not on record but it was probably held in June or July of 1911 which was eight or nine months before the Senate was appointed. This self-appointed committee proceeded in a remarkably high handed way to usurp the functions of a non-existent Senate by appointing an Organiser who was to be also a Registrar and general Senate adviser. Hackett even went so far after his return to Perth as to intimate that if a suitable Vice-Chancellor had appeared he would have been appointed.

There was nothing tentative or conditional about the appointment of Mr. Gunn. A letter written him by Hackett, who had of course absolutely no authority so to do, informed Gunn that he was to start work in September 1911 at £800 per annum with full travelling expenses while in England and for himself and wife and family to Western Australia. He was instructed to visit a number of English Universities in order to gain some knowledge of the management and organisation of modern Universities. He must have passed about seven months in this itinerary for he did not arrive in Perth until April 1912.
Hackett seems to have become rather uneasy as to the reaction of the West Australian public and the University Senate (when appointed) to his unauthorised action for on his return to Perth he published in the "West Australian" (September 30th, 1911) a long and elaborate 2½ column statement of all that had been done and reasons why, full copies of all Mr. Gunn's testimonials and of Hackett's letter of appointment to Gunn. The appointment, Hackett says in his statement "will have to be ratified by the Senate." This was a very much belated qualification.

On the agenda I received of the business to be transacted at the first Senate meeting in March 1912 and opposite the motion for the appointment of Gunn someone has written my name. The writing might be that of Battye. I had apparently been selected to move the appointment in order to silence one who might have objected to the farce of then appointing one who had been drawing salary and expenses for seven months. I have no recollection of moving, but it is on the records that I moved and Dr. Smith seconded the motion for the appointment of Gunn, so apparently I was deftly used to smooth out a nasty position.

From Hackett's statement published in his paper (September 1911) it appears that such a plebian idea as advertising for a suitable man never occurred to any of the self-appointed London committee, but after the most unfair, foolish and undemocratic way so favoured by University men, discreet enquiries were made and, in Hackett's language "our labours in securing a man whom we believed to be a fitting organiser were unexpectedly shortened" by a letter from Sir Charles Lucas drawing attention to the many virtues and qualifications of Mr. Hugh Gunn. Sir Charles did not know much about Gunn personally but was prepared to take the word of Lord Selbourne and he in turn referred to Lord Milner whose
knowledge was equally scant. The only man who had actually known Gunn's work in South Africa was Mr. H.F. Wilson, late Colonial Secretary of Orange Free State. His testimony is to the value of Mr. Gunn's services as Director of Primary Education and not about University organising which was the special knowledge we wanted.

Mr. Gunn's appointment as organiser of the West Australian University was a great blunder. He was to us a singularly useless person. He arrived a month late after the Senate had begun to organise without him. His seven months investigation into modern as well as ancient University management should have fitted him to assist the Senate but I do not think he ever submitted an idea on the subject which any University graduate could not have got out of any University Calendar. One of his absurd ideas was that the University on a grant of £13,500 per annum should start with ten Professors and two Lecturers.

In May 1912 he submitted a memorandum. Considering he had been on the pay roll since the previous September (nine months at £300) it was not much of a document. In it he first complained of his difficulties in finding office accommodation and a clerk and then makes the significant statement - "I have been told that some members think I have been rather reticent." Reticent is good: my recollection is that some Senators were pressing Hackett to know what he was doing.

At the seventh meeting of the Senate (July 1912) it was proposed by Mr. Burrows and seconded by Mr. Walker "that the organiser, Mr. Gunn, prepare for the next meeting "of the Senate a summary of the work done by him personally " (a) Since arriving in Western Australia.
" (b) Between the June and July meetings of the Senate."

This motion was far too direct for the Senate members. Its wording was more suitable for the Labour Conferences with which both Messrs. Burrows and Walker were familiar
and it was lost. But that it represented the views of members is shown in the wording of a resolution moved by Mr. Andrews and seconded by Mrs. Moss (two University people) and carried. It was — "That the organiser be asked to submit a report upon the progress of the work at each meeting of the Senate."

These two motions support the recollection I have of the growing dissatisfaction with Gunn and the mystery as to how he occupied his time. Hence this resolution requesting him to do what was obviously his duty without being asked. Why the interval between the June and July meetings was noted I do not remember; possibly he had been seen on a bender. His drinking habits were becoming notorious.

Senate 12th August, 1912 — On the motion of Battye and Walker Gunn was given three weeks sick leave.

A letter from Gunn dated 4th April, 1913 — He felt that the work for which he had been appointed was completed as far as his part was concerned and asking to be relieved of his duties at the earliest date. Smith, Wilson moved that the Organiser's wishes be met and it was carried. In May 1913 a further letter was received, very much to the relief of the Senate, stating that he would like definitely to terminate his engagement with the Senate on 30th June, 1913. This was agreed to, and so after drawing salary for one year and nine months, a total of £1,400 plus at least £400 in expenses Mr. Gunn finished. It was still thought necessary (Bath, Mackett) Senate July 1913, to ask the Finance Committee to appoint a small committee to go into the Organiser's handling of the finance. As the records of the Finance Committee of this period have been lost no one can now say what this committee found.

Notwithstanding this record of ineptitude and failure and notwithstanding my opposition, and very much to my
disgust Mr. Gunn was given on departure a flattering testimonial such as may have persuaded some other body to employ him. These testimonials are usually given without much sense of responsibility. This man Gunn had been given flattering testimonials by several noble Lords none of whom had any knowledge of his ability or lack of it with the result that he was foisted on to the W.A. University and into an influential position he was entirely unsuited for.

Mr. Fletcher.

The first appointment to the permanent administrative staff was Mr. Fletcher. He acted as minute taker at the first historical meeting of the Senate, having been loaned by the Education Department where he was employed as a clerk. This was in March 1912 and he continued in the service of the University until his early death in June 1927.

Mr. Fletcher was a big, dark, heavy man. He had been when young an active athlete. He had also taken an active interest in Municipal affairs and had reached the position of Mayor of a suburban Municipality. This experience of public business was of value to the University for it taught him how to keep Senate minutes - an accomplishment not so common as one might expect. Another accomplishment he possessed was the art of engrossing in the old heavy lettering used in ancient church and legal documents. This he used in recording the minutes of the early Senate meetings but the task soon grew too time absorbing.

Mr. Fletcher's work was very necessary but unobtrusive. His name is not connected with any particular work and so when he died in harness it could only be said that he had been a good and faithful servant for 15 years. During the whole of that period he did a great deal of unrecognised work. Beginning with a man of Gunn's habits and continuing during Whitfield's broken
terms and that of succeeding unpaid Vice-Chancellors he must have had to do most of the University routine administration.

In 1924 the Professorial Board, whose members were in a position to appreciate his work, recommended the Senate to appoint him Acting Registrar together with some increase in salary. The Senate in response decided to appoint him Acting Registrar at a salary of £450. In February 1927 he was taken ill with a heart attack and was granted leave on full pay. Not having recovered he was granted further sick leave in April and May but in June he died. The Senate passed unanimously a resolution appreciating his long service, and as there was no superannuation then in operation, granted Mrs. Fletcher an ex gratia gift of a fortnight's salary for each year of service to be paid at the rate of £5 per week. This would amount to something over £300. Not content with this Mrs. Fletcher applied for six months pay in lieu of long service leave and was granted £250. Two months later, in September, on receipt of a letter from the Premier Mrs. Fletcher was paid a further compassionate allowance of £288/9/3 for the period Mr. Fletcher had been in the Government service prior to joining the University staff. So no one can say that the University was niggardly in respect to the widow of this old servant.

Registrar.

At its meeting in May 1913 it was proposed by Dr. Saw that the Senate appoint a Registrar at £600. This was apparently thought to be rather extravagant for the meeting had two amendments at one time before it and postponement was eventually carried. The proposal was again reached at an adjourned meeting on 16th June, 1913 and a decision made to appoint a Registrar at £600 per annum. Applications were called for and no less than 108 were received. From this host Mr. Townsend was
selected. He was appointed by the Senate on 15th September, 1913. He was in England at the time and he was required to take up his duties on 1st January, 1914. His application was supported by an unusual number of flattering testimonials from amongst others Professor Edgeworth David, Professor McCallum, Professor Pitt Cobbett, Sydney's Emeritus Professor of Law and Mr. E.A. McDermott, Registrar General of New South Wales, under whom Mr. Townsend had been employed in the Lands Titles Office in Sydney.

Mr. Townsend was a B.A. and Bachelor of Laws of Sydney University. At the final examination for the Law degree he was awarded first class honours and the University Medal. What made this achievement the more notable was that during the last three years of his course for the LL.B. degree he was employed on the clerical staff of the Titles Office in Sydney. In his application he writes:-

"As sole trustee I have directed for some time the investment of sums varying from £2,000 to £7,000 forming part of a deceased estate and in connection with the same estate I have for some time acted as director of a private Company, the annual wage sheet of which amounts to between £9 and 10 thousands per annum."

He was born at Port MacKay, Queensland 29th June, 1885. He served the University for something less than one year when he enlisted. He was killed in action at the Dardanelles on 10th May, 1915. He was then just a month short of thirty years of age.

It is interesting to speculate what effect this talented and charming man would have had on the history of the University had not war robbed us of his services. If he had returned it is highly improbable that a Vice-Chancellor would have been thought necessary, and if one had been appointed it is highly probable that it would
have been Townsend. In either event the University finances would have felt the hand of one so highly qualified to the University's very great benefit.

Mr. R.E. Parker.

There is no record of the appointment of Mr. R.E. Parker, but an early decision of the General Purposes Committee (20th March, 1916) was to raise his salary from £175 to £200 so he must have begun with the University in a very humble capacity.

At that time Mr. Fletcher was Clerk to the Senate with undefined duties. After Mr. Fletcher died Parker received better wages and for a number of years he was receiving £500 per year. He was a devoted servant of the University and appeared to have no other interest in life. He was appointed Accountant and Clerk to the Senate 19th June, 1927.

He could be found at his office most nights and Sundays. He was a perfect living storehouse about all aspects of University business. In committee or at the Senate it was rare that any question about the finances, however unexpected, did not receive a satisfactory answer.

He was a small thin man with a small wrinkled, wizened face, clean shaved. He walked with a spring heeled action taking long strides for so small a man. There was one rather wearisome time for Parker. It was during the time while Mr. Preshaw was Registrar. Preshaw had an Arts degree and Parker was aware of the strong prejudice in favour of those who have that University stamp and he feared that if any retrenchment was forced upon us, by the mounting deficit, that Preshaw would be favoured before him. Parker was much relieved when Preshaw was appointed Registrar to Tasmania University. So acute did the rivalry become that during my time as Acting Vice-Chancellor I had to get them on the carpet with no withdrawal until we all three signed a list of
the duties of each. A real demarcation dispute.

Parker never looked the part of University Accountant. In addition to his small wizened figure he was always dressed in poorly fitting, shabby clothes. I remember about 1931 Sir Walter James, who liked Parker, asked me if I knew if he was hard up for, said Sir Walter, I would willingly find the money to buy him a set of decent teeth to take the place of that mouthful of rotten stumps which must be doing him a lot of harm. My reply to Sir Walter was that a single man without any known vices, not even cigarettes, who for many years had enjoyed a salary of 2500, should be, to use a colloquialism, well heeled.

Mr. Parker used more letters after his name than any other man in the University. What they signified I never enquired. When he began as Accountant the annual grant was £13,500 which was mainly absorbed by salaries and consequently the accountancy was of the simplest. But as time went on the grant increased to over three times that sum and the accounts had to provide for Trust money, Scholarship and Bursary money, special building grants and endowment investment etc. etc. Parker's system of book-keeping grew and expanded to meet the altered demands but it remained Parker's system. He and his auditors understood it but no-one else did. When Whitfield died and Professor Beasley became Acting Vice-Chancellor Parker was upset; so much that was necessary for understanding the accounts depended upon Parker's memory. He was taken seriously ill. This I am convinced was hastened (Parker was a timid man) by Beasley's truculent cross examination and overbearing manner. Beasley had not the sense or was too conceited to ask the auditors to explain the accounts and preferred to spread all sorts of wild rumours as to the state of confusion he said the accounts were in. But when at last the Auditors reported, it was found that not sixpence was
out of place and Parker's system of book-keeping, like himself, was shown to have been a good and faithful servant of the University.

Parker's illness continued and finally he had to resign, and it is pleasing now to recall that the University went to the limit of its authority and resources to provide for the remainder of his life. He died a comparatively young man — in the early fifties — but although he had been a hard worker for the University he was afflicted with a disease of the heart which would have taken him off at an early age even if he had had as soft a job as a Professor. He died on 2nd November, 1942.

Owing to his death at a comparatively early age the Superannuation Scheme, designed to provide a retiring sum at 65, was not of much benefit to him; but for the extended sick leave granted by the Senate he might have been hard pushed. In September 1940 the Senate approved of an amount not exceeding £623 being regarded as an ex gratia retiring allowance to him (two weeks' salary for each of his 27 years' service with the University) payment thereof to be made at the monthly rate of £21/13/4 until the sum of £623 was exhausted or until his death, whichever first happened (in the latter event any unpaid balance to be cancelled). The unpaid balance at the date of his death was £54. So fortunately his last days were free from money worries.

The official appreciation of his services recorded in the Senate minutes is as follows:— (August 1940)

"Mr. Ralph Ewart Parker joined the administrative staff of the University in December 1912, a short time after its establishment and a few months before teaching began. During his 27 years service with the University he saw the University grow from small and humble beginnings and throughout this long period he was intimately bound up with every aspect of its
"increasing administrative responsibilities. On the death
"of Mr. S.H. Fletcher in 1927 Mr. Parker was appointed
"Accountant and Clerk of Convocation at the June meeting
"of the Senate and he continued to carry out the duties
"connected with these offices, together with those of
"Clerk of Senate, until his illness on 16th October 1939.
"During his term of office Mr. Parker was very
"closely associated with the late Vice-Chancellor,
"Professor H.E. Whitfeld, and especially in regard to the
"responsibilities arising out of the Hackett and the
"Gledden Bequests. The erection of the Hackett buildings
"at Crawley and the subsequent transfer from Irwin Street
"threw heavy additional work on the administrative staff
"in general and on Mr. Parker in particular. Similarly,
"increased work in connection with the Science Buildings
"at Crawley and the Gledden Buildings in Perth as well as
"the Institute of Agriculture added to the burden he was
"called upon to carry.

"Esteemed by those who came in contact with him Mr.
"Parker was at all times unswerving in his devotion to the
"University, and his intimate knowledge of University
"history and affairs was invaluable to everyone concerned.
"His enforced retirement through ill health following on
"the death of Professor H.E. Whitfeld with whom he worked
"for so many years during the formative period of the
"University, has added to the loss which was sustained
"in the passing of the University's first permanent Vice-
"Chancellor."