Gnowangerup plaque recognises value of light land research

Department of Agriculture, Western Australia
The Gnowangerup Shire Council has paid a unique tribute to officers of the Department of Agriculture by erecting a plaque in recognition of the value of research leading to the development of light land in that district.

The plaque, which was unveiled by the Minister for Agriculture (Mr. C. D. Nalder) on July 10, 1963, reads:

This plaque is erected by the Gnowangerup Shire Council in recognition of the outstanding experimental work carried out by the officers of the Department of Agriculture of Western Australia for the development of light lands, and in appreciation of the value of this work to our district and to Western Australia.

It is set on a rugged 6-ton piece of granite which stands by the side of the Shire Council office in the main street of Gnowangerup.

The plaque is tangible evidence of the appreciation of the Gnowangerup Shire Council of the importance of light land development to the agriculture of this district.

Strong interest in the development of light land in this area dates back to 1947, when the then Superintendent of Wheat Farming, Mr. I. Thomas, visited Gnowangerup with Dr. T. C. Dunne (now Director of Agriculture) and Mr. G. H. Burvill (now Chief of the Department's Plant Research Division) to confer with Road Board representatives on developing scrub and mallee country in this part of the State.

These officers planned an experimental programme, and with the enthusiastic co-operation of Mr. Keith House, Mr. Tom Wellard, Mr. Bill Cuneo of the Road Board and other residents of the area, the Department of Agriculture established trial plots at a number of sites. Two of the earliest of these were at “Campbell's Plots” about 20 miles south-east of Borden, and on Mr. Cuneo's property. These were planted by Mr. S. T. Smith and Mr. T. E. McDowell.

Many more trials followed, most of them supervised by Research Officer W. J. Toms and District Adviser G. T. Halpin. Other officers closely associated with this work included Mr. F. L. Shier (now Deputy Director of Agriculture), Mr. A. S. Wild and Mr. H. G. Cariss. Officers of the Land Settlement Board strongly supported the light land research and put its results to good use in the development of some 130 farms in the Jerramungup-Gairdner River War Service Land Settlement area.

The results of the many experiments carried out on these light land trial plots were to play an important part in the very rapid development which followed in the Gnowangerup Shire Council district, development which has played a significant part in the light land “revolution” which has taken place in Western Australia over the last 10 years or so. For example, between 1956 and 1962, cleared land in the Shire of Gnowangerup increased by 197,000 acres, an increase second only to that recorded in Esperance among the many shires in Western Australia in which such development has taken place.

This development has led the Gnowangerup Shire Council to pay this unusual tribute to the agricultural scientists whose work made possible the utilisation of light land for farming.

However, it should also be recorded that the success of this work depended to a large extent on the willing and active co-operation of the farmers who helped to carry out the trials, the members of the Shire Council itself, the War Service Land Settlement officials and finally the many settlers who put into immediate practice the findings of the light land research in these districts.
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