

By Noel Adams. About July 1949.

The surprising thing about L.B. at present is that it has become a town. It has suddenly grown up, like a schoolboy whom one hasn't seen for some time.

This is what happened at Whyalla. One day it consisted of a crushing plant, a loading jetty, a diminutive bush pub, a scatter of houses, a bunch of offices & workshops & little else. The next - so it seems - it was a spreading bustling town with blast furnace, shipyards etc etc. This is the sort of shock L.B. holds for the returning visitor today.

The resemblance is one of impressions rather than details. Both towns have grown since yesterday, as it were, both are the products of great undertakings, & both reflect the industrial change that has overtaken the State in so short a time.

L.B. Coalfield (more correctly Telford) is the younger, & will never rival Whyalla in size or importance, but as an achievement it is every bit as notable.

The opening up of the field is the first really significant development that has occurred in the Far North since construction of the Alice Springs railway. The open-cut workings, the heavy plant, the lines of trucks on the roads, the gangs at work on the aerodrome, or the new north cut. These are sights that distinguish L.B. They mark it off from any other place to be met with in well over 1000 miles of country between P.A. & Tennant Creek goldfields. When you add to them, the new town that has gone up on what was just a railway siding a few years ago, you realize that more concerted enterprise has gone into L.B. since the war, than has been put into any other part of our north, the Centre or the N.T.

Going to L.B. by road, from Adelaide, you pass through one after another of the northern pastoral towns, some of which have seen more exciting days

<sup>2</sup> but which are all now settled down to a placid existence. Then from the plain rises L.C. Unlike the others, it has not grown out of the soil, but been planted down on top of it like a new metropolitan suburb. The others spread & bind - this one is planned & compact. The older places have acquired some shade & mellowness - L.C. is nakedly new.

The town is laid out in a fairly tight pattern of broad streets, which the houses face squarely in neat lines. The streets are still unmade, & when I was there last week, in the rain, only people with gumboots could use them. The sealing of the roads is to be started as soon as the surfacing of the aerodrome is completed - about 3 months hence. All-weather streets & footpaths will make life much more pleasant for L.C.'s 600 inhabitants. Trees have been planted in the streets, & in some of the areas set aside as parks, & many householders have begun gardens. In a semi-arid ~~area~~ climate like L.C., gardening is very much a labor of faith. Most of the houses are built of asbestos or concrete brick. Those some of the most recent are of shale brick, which is made locally. The standard house has 3 bedrooms & is rented from the Trust for 27/- a week. This is a subsidised rental & it includes the hiring of an electric stove & refrigerator. A number of houses also have an air-conditioning plant, & coal for fires is - of course - free.

The only criticism I heard of the houses, is that there are not nearly enough of them. The Trust estimates that it will need about 160 houses, which is double the number it has so far built there.

Houses are allotted to married employees on a points system based on their length of service at L.C., their war service, the type of job they are doing, & size of their family. Single men, who naturally predominate, live either in tents

quarters. The tents have been there since work began on the coalfields. As the town has grown, they have become more & more of an eyesore, but as they are free, some men prefer them to the single men's quarters.

Some of the latter are in a largeissen hut. Each man has a cubicle for which he pays 10/6 a week. For this, he also gets his bed made, his room cleaned, & his washing done. On top of this he pays 32/6 week for meals. In the quarters there is a billiard room, & across the street is the wet canteen, which is open from 3 pm to 6 pm six days a week. A hotel lies somewhere in the future!

Life in L.B. is much more congenial for the married people than for the single men — or men without their wives & families there. A clerk & his wife, with a young family, said — that in spite of duststorms & the general rawness, they have a better time in L.B. than they used to have in Adelaide — & they have a much better house to live in. They were quite content to stay till the children were several years older.

There is a picture theatre with shows 3 times a week, & a dance once a week. A welfare committee runs a sports evening every Tuesday with table tennis & other indoor games.

There are tennis courts, lit for playing at night, a football & cricket oval, & a basketball court. A soccer ground is now being prepared for the British migrants & new Aussies, who form a considerable part of L.B.'s population.

It is hoped the children's playground will soon begin to take shape. More than £1,000 was publicly subscribed for it in Adelaide last year, as a mark of gratitude to L.B. workers for the way they kept industry — & jobs — going, during the general coal strike. Another project in view is a swimming pool, which will be as big a boon, as the playground will be to the children.

4  
One of the worries of being a parent in L.C. is that the town has only an elementary medical service. There is a trained sister in the town, attached to a church mission, but the nearest doctor is at Hawker over 100 miles away. He visits L.C. once a week, but there is always the fear that he may not be able to "get through" for one reason or another. No one likes to think of what might happen in the case of a serious accident or some other emergency.

As for a dentist, there is one at Port Augusta, 170 miles away, who intends to bring L.C. into his itinerary before long. Like the schoolboy who has grown up while one's back was turned, L.C. has yet to "fill out" & make itself comfortable.

This should happen just as quickly as the first part.

Mr. Playford, who has all but built L.C. with his own hands, announced last week that, on the basis of an estimated production of a million tons of coal a year, there is a 30 year's reserve in sight on the field.

Long before then L.C. should be not only the most enterprising, but also the most attractive town of the Far North.

# Leigh Creek is Like A Schoolboy

By NOEL ADAMS

*The surprising thing about Leigh Creek at present is that it has become a town. It has suddenly grown up, like a schoolboy whom one hasn't seen for some time.*

**T**HIS is what happened at Whyalla. Anyone who knew Whyalla in the early days of its development—say, 18 years ago—and has been back to it at odd times since then will understand the sort of shock that Leigh Creek holds for the returning visitor today.

One day Whyalla consisted of a crushing plant, a loading jetty, a diminutive bush pub, a scatter of houses, a bunch of offices and workshops, and very little else.

The next—so it seems—it was a spreading, bustling town, with blast furnace, shipyards, shops, schools and most of the other appurtenances and amenities of a modern industrial centre.

The resemblance between Whyalla and Leigh Creek is one of impressions rather than details and must not be too closely scanned. Both towns have grown since yesterday, as it were, both are the products of great undertakings and both reflect the industrial change that has overtaken this State in so short a time.

Leigh Creek coalfield (Telford is the correct name of the town, though few people use it), is the younger of the two, and it can never hope to rival Whyalla in size or importance. But as an achievement it is every bit as notable.

## Attack On The North

**T**HE opening up of the coalfield is the first really significant development that has occurred in the Far North since the construction of the railway line to Alice Springs. That stands out plainly in the very look of Leigh Creek.

The open-cut workings, the heavy plant, the lines of trucks on the roads, the gangs at work on the aerodrome or the new north cut—these are sights that distinguish Leigh Creek. They mark it off from any other place to be met with in well over a thousand miles of country between Port Augusta and the Tennant Creek goldfields.

And when you add to them the new town that has gone up on what, a few years back, was no more than a railway siding, you realise that more concerted enterprise has gone into Leigh Creek since the war than has been put into any part of our North, the Centre or the Northern Territory.

Going to Leigh Creek by road from Adelaide you pass through one after another of the northern pastoral towns, some of which have seen more exciting days, but which are all now settled down to a placid existence.

Then from the plain rises Leigh Creek. Unlike the others it has not grown out of the soil, but been planted down on top of it like a new metropolitan suburb. The others spread and wind; this one is planned and compact. The older places

have acquired some shade and mellowness (though not as much as they ought to have done); Leigh Creek is nakedly new.

## All To Plan

**T**HE town is laid out in a fairly tight pattern of broad streets which the houses face squarely in neat lines. The streets are still unmade, and when I was there last week, in the rain, only people with gumboots could use them. I was told that the sealing of the roads is to be started as soon as the surfacing of the aerodrome has been completed—probably about three months hence. All-weather streets and footpaths will help to make life much more pleasant for Leigh Creek's 600 inhabitants.

Trees have been planted in the streets and in some of the areas set aside as parks, while a number of householders have begun gardens. In a semi-arid climate like Leigh Creek's, gardening is very much a labor of faith, but with the splendid example of Broken Hill to go by, a few years should make a vast difference to the present starkness.

Most of the houses are built of asbestos or concrete brick, though some of the most recent ones are of shale brick,

which is made locally. The standard house has three bedrooms and is rented from the Electricity Trust for 27/ a week. This is a subsidised rental and it includes the hiring of an electric stove and a refrigerator. A number of the houses also have an air-conditioning plant, and coal for fires is, of course, free.

The only criticism I heard of the houses is that there are not nearly enough of them. The trust estimates that it will need about 160 houses, which is double the number it has so far built.

Houses are allotted to married employes on a points system based on their length of service at Leigh Creek, their war service, the type of job they are doing and the size of their family.

## Those Tents

**S**INGLE men, who naturally predominate, live either in tents or quarters. The tents have been there since work was begun on the coalfields. As the town has grown they have become more and more of an eyesore, and nothing would please the trust more than to do away with them. As they are free, some men prefer them to the single men's quarters, but the real reason they remain is the general pressure on living space.

I saw some of the single men's quarters in a large Nissen hut. Each man has a cubicle for which he pays 10/6 a week. For this he also gets his bed made, his room cleaned and his washing done. On top of this he pays 32/6 a week for messing. In the quarters there is a billiards room and across the street is the wet canteen, which is open from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. six days a week. A hotel lies somewhere in the future.

## Family Life Counts

**W**HAT is life like then in Leigh Creek? I imagine it is much more congenial for the married people than it is for single men, or men without their wives and families. Family life counts for a good deal in a town like this. A clerk and his wife who have a young family told me that, in spite of summer duststorms and the general rawness, they have a better time in Leigh Creek than they used to have in Adelaide. They were among the lucky ones with a house—much better, they admitted, than the one they had had in Adelaide—and they said they were quite con-

tent to stay till the children were two or three years older.

They have a picture theatre with shows three times a week, and a dance once a week. A welfare committee runs a sports evening every Tuesday with table tennis and other indoor games. There are tennis courts lit for playing at night, a football and cricket oval, and a basketball court. A soccer ground is now being prepared for the British migrants and New Australians, who together form a considerable part of Leigh Creek's population.

Soon, too, it is hoped the children's playground will begin to take shape. More than £1,000 was publicly subscribed for it in Adelaide last year as a mark of gratitude to the Leigh Creek workers for the way in which they helped to keep industry—and jobs going—during the general coal strike. The playground will be a boon to the children of all ages, and it will also do a lot to improve the appearance of the town. Another project for the future is a swimming pool.

## No Doctor

**O**NE of the worries of being a parent in Leigh Creek is that the town has only an elementary medical service. There is a trained sister in the town attached to a church mission, but the nearest doctor is at Hawker, over 100 miles away. He visits Leigh Creek once a week, but there is always the fear that he may not be able to "get through" for one reason or another, and no one cares to think of what might happen in the case of a serious accident or some other emergency. However, as an example of the way in which things sometimes work out, a woman recently chose the day of the doctor's regular visit to give birth to her child.

As for a dentist, there is one at Port Augusta, 170 miles away, who, I believe, intends to bring Leigh Creek into his itinerary before very long.

Like the schoolboy who has grown up while one's back has been turned, Leigh Creek has yet to "fill out" and make itself comfortable. This further process will probably happen just as quickly as the first. Mr. Playford, who has all but built Leigh Creek with his own hands, announced last week that, on the basis of an estimated production of a million tons of coal a year, there is a 30 years' reserve in sight on the field. Long before then Leigh Creek should be not only the most enterprising but also the most attractive town of the Far North.