

Was so different

had never seen a screen in operation, he was vastly knowledgeable. “Well, I’d watched it for a couple of years in London,” he said, wryly. He’d been captivated by the medium, particularly the news programs hosted by the likes of Robin Day and Ludovic Kennedy, and applied for the news director’s job as soon as the TVW licence was granted.

He switched from WA Newspapers to TVW in July 1959, just three months before the station opened. On the basis of “two or three weeks” training in Melbourne — where they were not all that expert anyway — he had to learn a new set of skills in a hurry, principally how to change his thinking from the written word to the spoken, and how to put those words on film. And how to teach others to do it.

In retrospect, it was primitive stuff: the manual cutting and gluing of film, always wary that the glue might melt and the film unravel just as it was about to go to air; always waiting on film from interstate and overseas until the days of coaxial cable and satellite arrived . . . and the arrival of videotape in 1962 in time for the Commonwealth Games coverage, which he produced.

He recruited many of his staff from WA Newspapers, including photographers-turned-cameramen Keith “Digby” Milner and Tom Hall, reporter Ross Cusack as his deputy and future head cameramen Peter Goodall and Lu Belci. Milner was killed in a plane crash on assignment near Cervantes in 1960. His son, Greg, a child when his father died, later became a reporter at the station.

Newsgathering, Mr Farrell remembers, was catch as catch can, helped by some strategic thinking and the ability of the two cameramen to film up to 10 stories a day, always with their eye on the budget for the expensive film.

“ABC radio had a ball-by-ball coverage of the Sheffield Shield cricket matches at the WACA,” he said. By listening to it all day, with an ear open for sirens, the cameramen were able to get a jump on the city’s big news stories.

There were mistakes, of course. Things went wrong. But most viewers, he suspected, didn’t know any better anyway. And the reception was often indifferent, too, helping to hide the moments best forgotten.

“We did good things, though,” he said. “In our first year we sent a team to Rome for the Olympics; we were the first channel in Australia to show the FA Cup final live. We once sent an outside-broadcast van to Melbourne to provide a live coverage of a Sheffield Shield match that wasn’t being shown anywhere else but which was vital to WA winning the competition.” 7



Above: Tom Hall.

Far Left: Ross Cusack and Darcy Farrell.

Left: Darcy Farrell.