

At the Chalk Face

FORMER maths teacher and headmaster, Bob Burcher replaced the three 'Rs,' with the three 'Ps' – People, Places and the Press, in his recent talk, 'At the Chalk Face' to fellow members of Kyrle Probus Club.

His father had been a farrier, as had his grandfather and as a teenager he had also tried out the trade, helping his father. But after witnessing the de-horning of cattle and being bitten on the shoulder by a horse, while he was nailing on a shoe, he decided it was not for him.

He said he had an 'interesting' introduction to the world of education at a school that had been set up by combining two schools on separate sites on either side of a railway line. Before the schools combined, the pupils used to meet under a railway arch and 'knock hell out of each other,' not a good omen for the new school.

The deputy head of the now combined school was in charge of discipline, but not very successfully, Bob felt. Half way through his first year in teaching, he thought he could not carry on, but then decided he could not give up.

After working at a number of different schools, he got a job in a brand new comprehensive as head of department and later became deputy head of another brand new comprehensive. The head here was 'fantastic' Bob said, but it was while the head was away and he was in charge that he had his first brush with the Press.

It came when a parent took exception to the school keeping a hamster in a school building, although it was not for any experimental purposes and contacted the Animal Liberation Front who promptly painted the letters ALF on the building and went to the Press.

He later became head of another school and his first year coincided with a national strike by teachers, while there was further contact with the Press over a coach crash involving pupils, not from his school, but from another school and also the negative way the local paper had highlighted one aspect of an OFSTED report on his school.

Overall however, the school was great and the pupils were great, said Bob and this was the most rewarding part of his job as head teacher.

