WE WEEP TO SEE
(A palimpsest for JHP: revisiting the Old Bill)

I wandered into the Railway Hotel’s front bar. It was three o’clock on a weekday. The air that floats heavily at this time of the afternoon lingered over beer mats, stained jarrah wood.

When all is said and done, what’re we here for? I said that to the barman, Steve. But just then a host of Japanese tourists burst in, cameras swinging, plimsoles squeaking. The bus stood beside the lake. Steve couldn’t even answer me, so busy drawing beers and searching for ice.

Fluttering, darting about, their tour guide, tried to explain what each desired while I just leaned on my elbow, ears full of babble of their baffling tongue. I thought to myself, it’s like when you walk past bee hives. With a wave and a twinkle in his eye, Steve spoke to me over bobbing heads: How’s this, boyo? Better I serve ’em here than when they stretched that railway towards Burma. At least this time It’s me making a buck! I’d had enough. Went along the parquetry past them, out into the street.

Tar road heat hit me as the easterly blew ten thousand head of wild oats in devil dance.
I pulled my bike from shade of york gums tossing their heads in that breeze. It could turn to a willy-willy in an instant, launch scrap paper, whip the waves up over the salt lakes.

I threw a leg across the saddle and pushed that ancient grid til I out did myself, past Co-op and Roads Board towards my little spot, the ‘jwb & i’ by the creek. A poet once said, ‘How is it that you live and what is it you do?’ Well, my answer in such a case would be, ‘Yet still I persevere.’ Entering my gate, propping Malvern Star on a post. I gazed at my vegie patch, now pretty dry, and said, what wealth you gave me all of winter and spring! True I’d stripped vines of beans for oft my garden seemed to grow obsessed, as if to bury me in plenitude of sprout, leaf and tuber. In vacant lots you see this frenzy with weeds that can’t abide a square foot of bare ground. Flashing their instincts—all those stomata reckless to the sun.

1 Old WA real estate descriptive jargon for a bungalow constructed of jarrah weatherboards with a corrugated iron roof.