

POST called on Australia's richest, shyest writer—but he wouldn't come to the door!

SHUTE — the silent success

ROBINSON ROAD, Langwarrin, is a typical unmade Australian bush track. It is potholed, and narrow, slippery and treacherous in winter, dusty in summer. It winds through acres of tea-tree scrub and past a dozen sleepy farms in the bush behind Frankston, Victoria.

But Robinson Road is the most important road in Australia to some of the biggest men in the publishing and film worlds of London, New York — and Hollywood

It has nothing to distinguish it from a hundred bush tracks like it, anywhere in Australia.

It is where Nevil Shute, the aeronautical engineer - turned novelist, one of the most successful writers of modern times, has made his Australian home.

From Robinson Road to publishers in Britain, the Shute manuscripts come to Robinson Road from the Age of Radios of the end-less streak of hefty cheques.

Any day now a \$100,000 cheque will come to Robinson Road—from producer Stanley Kramer, in Hollywood.

It will be in payment for the film rights to Shute's latest best-seller, "On the Beach," the story of Melbourne's last hours as the last outpost of life in a world destroyed by hydrogen bombs and radiation.

Shute was headline news a few weeks ago when Kramer announced

in Hollywood that he had bought the film rights and was preparing to shoot the picture in its own setting, Melbourne.

Most writers would think they were set for life if they could write ONE book good enough to be made into a big-budget film. Shute does it all the time.

Among his stories that have been winners on the screen are "Pied Piper" (about the last days of the war in France, 1940 — it was one of the most poignant and dramatic stories of the war), "No Highway in the Sky" (film version of Shute's best-selling "No Highway"), and "The Story of a Scientist's Fight to Prove His Theory that Metal Fatigue Will Kill an Airliner." Months after the film was made, the first Comet jet airliner disasters occurred. The cause: metal fatigue!).

Shute wrote his "A Town Like Alice," which became another highly successful film, after he had flown out to Australia in 1949 to look us over.

Nevil Shute has been a big-name novelist for 20 years. Before that

he was a big name in British aeronautical circles.

In fact, he is better known by name to Australians than any Australian-born writer.

His books certainly sell more copies in Australia than anything written by any Australian.

But Shute, the man, what is he like? Where and how does he live? What does he do when he's not writing? Does he travel among us, getting material?

Those are questions few people in this country can answer, because the only time Nevil Shute's name appears in the newspapers is when he has written another best seller, or when a film company buys his story for a fat fee.

When the news came of Hollywood's purchase of "On the Beach" POST decided it was time to go behind the bookstalls and find the real Nevil Shute.

We'd seek answers to questions about him all of his readers, and our readers, too, must be asking.

Where to find him? That was the first question.

His full name, we knew, was Nevil Shute Norway. First we tried the telephone directory. No Nevil Shute or Nevil S. Norway listed there.

"Not listed"

Our book publishing contacts put us on a track. "He lives at Red Hill, down Dromana way, on the Mornington Peninsula," they said.

On to the telephone again. Trunk lines. "Nevil Shute or Norway, at Red Hill, Dromana or Mornington," we ordered. A long wait, and then the answer. "Sorry, Mr. Shute, or Mr. Norway, is not listed," we were told.

Well, that didn't surprise us exactly. A busy author probably disliked telephones, anyway, we reasoned. Perhaps he purposely didn't have a telephone connected.

LEFT: A rare photograph of Nevil Shute and his wife, taken when they reached Australia in 1950 to make their home. Shute now refuses to pose for pictures, or give Press interviews.



So we drove to Frankston, about 25 miles from Melbourne, the gateway to the Mornington Peninsula. He should be easy to trace from there, we figured. At a swank Frankston hotel we were told, "Nevil Shute? Yes, sir, he lives at Mount Eliza, I think. I'm not sure of the correct address, though. Better inquire at the florists. They know everyone who's anyone."

The slim young woman at the florist shop said brightly. "Mr. Shute? Of course, he's living at Cranbourne. He passed this way an hour ago. No, I don't know EXACTLY where he lives. But he's often in town here. A charming man."

More inquiries at Frankston convinced us that Shute lived "somewhere along Robinson Road, Langwarrin."

Robinson Road was a track off the main road to Hastings, about four miles from Frankston. We bumped along it until we came to a farmhouse.

A tired-faced woman answered our knock. "Mr. Shute? Yes, he lives up the road a bit. About a mile or so. You can't miss it. Lovely new home, cream brick, with a lovely wall in front and a big drive up to the house. Look for two big silver water tanks."

We found it, just as she'd described it, two miles up the road. A low, modern ranch-style home with a tiled roof, nestling under two big gums, 200 yards in from the road. A new station wagon, and a Volkswagen rested in the double

