

Continuing ... "I Remember the Good / Bad Old Days"

The two main bogies were the dreaded public examinations that certainly decided your future career, the Intermediate and the Leaving.

There were no protests from teachers, pupils or parents. On such occasions as Empire Day and Speech Night, distinguished guest speakers from the Education Department proudly informed us that we had the best school system in the world. The Establishment was nowhere threatened, and everywhere there was unchallenged authoritarianism.



Study was a full-time job. Sex had not yet been discovered, there were no cars for teenagers, no talking pictures, no television, not even radio broadcasts. We did have, however, the Complete Works of William Shakespeare, Hall and Stevens: "Geometry", Baker and Bourne: "Algebra", and stacks of Deadwood Dicks, Buffalo Bills and Billy Bunters.

And yet we were happy. The War to end all wars had come to an end, the Great Depression was far off into the future, and skirts above the knee and the wearing of the latest craze, shiny, flattering black silk stockings, brought many an attractive girl to be called by a discerning teacher to come out to the front of the class and work out some difficult problem on the blackboard. We were, indeed, living in the Gay Twenties.

The school itself was a very closely-knit unit. There were no apparent disciplinary problems, no corporal punishment, no cadets, and no voicing in chorus of a school pledge.

There was no Tuck Shop. But each lunch-time, Mr. Tuttle drove his creamy horse and cart into the middle of the playground, and sold solid vanilla ices in summer and hot pies in winter. He has become immortal in the elegiac doggerel written by Mr. Archie Coombes for one of our School Magazines:

"No tinny trumpet tootles Tuttle's title to publicity, etc".

We studied Latin in the first three years at least, so that the School War Cry began: "Nova, Nova, New! Castra, Castra, Castle!" and it was not surprising that our olive-skinned School Beauty Queen had been known from First Year as "Nigra Pulcherrima". It is worthy of note that when she enrolled at Sydney University, she became known as "The Vision Splendid".

Unfortunately, sport played only a very small part in our school life. Because of the longer school day that was worked in high schools, Friday afternoon was granted as a holiday. For outstanding players, there were the School Cricket Eleven and the School Rugby Fifteen. The other boys were free to go swimming in summer and to engage in athletics in winter. The girls were offered tennis, hockey and basketball. This lack of training in organised sport

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made some of us feel out of things in later life, something that fortunately cannot happen these days.

And what of our old teachers? Unless the mists of time have enhanced their memory, I think that they were different from the assembly-line products of the present system. They were more academic, more bookish, more revered, more interesting, more individualistic, and therefore, I suppose, less competent.

But they were all "characters". There were Alexander Nairn, who had spent so many years as tutor to Chinese princes that his eyes had become oriental slits: Podge Harrison, who had saved France and the Allies in the fighting on the banks of the River Somme in the Great War: Rupert Scott, who had represented Australia in rugby, had sailed around the Horn in a windjammer, and who recited lovingly line after line of English poetry after his lunch-time batons: Archie Coombes, the English essayist with the mod gear: Miss Ethel Ross, who had the most beautiful ankles in the world and a brother recognised as one of the greatest Rugby fullbacks of all time: Mr George Saxby, known as the "Grey Ghost", who rarely associated with us ordinary mortals: Claude Brown, who was reputed to be more than a hundred years old: Mickey Piper, who taught art in a bowler hat: Danny Scoular, who could make the bravest spirit quake by the mere utterance of "Next!", if you happened to blunder in an oral Latin translation, and who did not hesitate to give a mark of minus four out of a hundred even in a final examination, if he disliked your handwriting.

There are no "characters" these days, no teachers whose memory will, in twenty years' time, inspire a flood of anecdotes, apocryphal or otherwise.

"Where are the snows of yesteryear?" Aye, where are they?

But it is a vain exercise to make such comparisons. The school of 1922, or the school of 1972? What does it matter? Is Gunsynd better than Phar Lap, who was greater than Carbine?

If I may be permitted to use an expression taught to us many years ago at N.H.S., I shall end with the trite remark; "Qui vivra verra!"