

BLUNDEN, Tom – Old Boy (1941-1945), Prefect 1945, former English Teacher

Below is a eulogy by his son. Although it doesn't mention Tom's teaching at NBHS, some OBA Committee men recall his teaching them English between 1961 and 1963. Tom passed away on 9 July 2019.

Eulogy 12 July 2019.

Thomas William Blunden, or 'Tom', was born in Hamilton, on the 10th of September 1928, to Marion and George Blunden. A mischievous and cheeky young man with curly blonde hair, he grew up with his younger sister Beatrice at Tickhole (near Cardiff), on an orchard with dogs, chickens and snakes. During the Great Depression, Tom learned many hard lessons, but also started to gather his myriad of stories during what would be a varied, long and remarkable life. Later, he would recall running alongside steam trains and picking the best oranges from the orchard, something he thought may have contributed to his longevity.

Marion and George were strict, principled and resourceful. In his childhood years, Tom travelled with his father, who painted and repaired schools throughout NSW, and he attended Newcastle Boys High School. These years were filled with camping, adventuring, travelling, motorcycle riding and swimming. As a teenager, Tom discovered his lifelong love of travel by joining the YHA – visiting a large number of towns and locations across NSW and Australia - and was later awarded an honorary life membership. Leading the Newcastle Region YHA, Tom also restored, built or worked on various hostels, including Carrington and Girvan.

In 1947, Tom attended Balmain Teachers College, before his first position at a one-man school at Berami Creek / Mount Dangar. He was 21 years old.

In the post-war period, a young Tom taught English to newcomers for four years at the Greta Migrant Camp, which has been recently recognised as an important historical location, and the source of many cherished memories for those who were taught. Tom's inclusive nature was strengthened here with all races, religions and languages taught as equals. He was a brilliant teacher, and handy with a boomerang, often taking his students into the field and teaching them how to throw.

In the late 1940's and early 50's, Tom joined the army, became a corporal and trained on Matilda tanks, before moving into the air force reserve and flying Wirraways and Tigermoths, sometimes great distances across NSW (from Schofields to Wagga Wagga). He had many stories of near misses and treasured his beret and uniform.

In 1954, Tom taught at Girvan, another one-man school, as one of the last teachers there – later helping to convert it to a YHA.

In 1955, Tom married Marie Cunynghame and they went to England. The next year, Marie came home to have Sally, while Tom stayed to complete his nine-month contract. Tom and

Marie raised Sally and Andrew, filling their childhood with camping, YHA events, travel and competitive sailing with Andrew on Lake Macquarie in his Heron sailboat “Saga”.

Sadly, Marie passed away in 1977 due to cancer and heart problems.

In 1972, Tom became a Tour Manager with Vacation Tours, and led groups of teachers on tours to many countries including England, France, East and West Germany, Netherlands, Yugoslavia, Italy, Spain, Morocco, Algeria, Greece, Fiji, Noumea and South East Asia. As a tourist, he also travelled extensively by cruise ships and planes to places including Scotland, Ireland, Lord Howe Island and even Tahiti.

Tom taught at Newcastle Tech High School (now Merewether High), as an English teacher, History Head Master, and Acting Principal. He was a popular and engaging teacher, with a passion for education. Tom wrote four text books on history and general studies, including “Man Is The Measure”, together with colleagues such as Alan Richardson. He also taught at Raymond Terrace and West Wallsend High School, as Deputy Principal, where he dreaded giving out the cane... perhaps he was thinking of his own mischievous childhood.

Tom met Barbara Woolley at Newcastle Tech High School and they married in 1980. By 1982, they were raising Janet and David, who would both later attend Merewether High. Their childhood included travel around Australia, a cruise or two, campervans across Tasmania, raising their dog Monty and countless life lessons.

18 Randall Parade was the family home for more than 50 years. Tom’s spare time was spent in the garage, working with wood making furniture, and in the garden growing silverbeet, beans and chokos. He was the spirit at parties, bringing his famous wooden frogs, calling folk dancing, and playing “I love to go a-wandering” or “Camp Granada” on his ukelele or guitar.

After retiring from teaching in 1989, Tom taught non-English speaking background classes and report writing for four years with Newcastle WEA, and history classes at an evening college in Hamilton. In his 70’s he and Barbara even travelled to Hangzhou, China, to teach English.

You can teach an old dog new tricks, as Tom became involved with the Newcastle Magicians Society in the 1990’s – attending conventions and performing newspaper magic or compering at magic shows.

A consistent trend in Tom’s life is that of religion and volunteering. Tom was deeply principled and spiritual, and his involvement with S Stephens Church was consistent and loyal. He was awarded Warden Emeritus for his services in 2014.

Also in 2014, the house at Randall Parade was sold as Tom and Barbara moved to independent living unit in Hamilton, and then to Jesmond Grove in 2018. Tom celebrated his 90th birthday in September 2018 – a cherished milestone for him, with many family and friends present. In his final years, Tom took great joy in being with his family and grandchildren, reflecting with gratitude upon his blessings, sharing in their adventures, and enjoying happy memories of a full and glorious life.

NBHS 1945 Prefects



Back row: (l to r) W Walker, R Thompson, L Simpson, A Knott*, N Chapman, L Molyneux

Middle row: (l to r) E Long, D McKenzie, D Parker, A Hill, T Blunden, N Bevan

Front row: (l to r) J Baker, G Renfrew, R Carruthers (Captain), W Pillans (Headmaster), D Short (Deputy Headmaster), R Pountney (Vice-Captain), R Trew, A Taggart

Absent: H Crosland, J Selkirk

* *Rhodes Scholar*

CHILDREN







