



11/11/2013 02:51

A short story

"ATTENDING THE SCHOOL ON THE HILL-NEWCASTLE"

by Oscar Edward Westbury born 25 March 1920 at Hanbury Street Mayfield a suburb of Newcastle in the state of New South Wales and who attended Newcastle Boys' High School 1932-1934.

As best his memory in 2014 allows.

Whilst I was born in Mayfield my first memory of life is of living in Union Street Tighes Hill where the street lights were powered by gas. Often in the afternoon I would see a man walking along the footpath and light each of those lights. They were turned off each morning by supply being cut at the gasworks.

Bathing at home was in a galvanised iron tub about a metre diameter and about 30 centimetres deep.

I started my schooling at Tighes Hill Primary but towards the end of the third year my family moved to Mayfield West but I was able to complete the year at Tighes Hill. To do this I needed to travel by bus and for the return journey, even though only 7 years old and on my own, I walked from the school down Elizabeth Street, crossed the wide Maitland Road which at that time had neither traffic lights nor a pedestrian crossing and waited for Stephenson's (or Stevenson's) bus to take me home. Reason for that particular bus was that it was the only one of those servicing Mayfield West which went as far as Werribi Street which is where my home was.

The last three years of primary school were spent at Mayfield West except for part of one year when the early periods one day per week were spent back at Tighes Hill Primary where the boys attended a woodworking class which was carving wood by hand. My guess is that the girls attended needlework. We travelled there by bus but walked back to school as we had time and it saved a penny.

The results of an examination referred to as the "QC" which we sat for towards the end of the 6th class year determined the high school each was to attend and in my case it was Newcastle Boys' High.

At that time three other High Schools existed in Newcastle which were Newcastle Girls' High, with others at Cooks Hill and Broadmeadow.

The differences between the schools were that Cooks Hill was coeducational and held classes up to 4th year whilst Broadmeadow was segregated into domestic science for girls and industrial subjects for boys with both going to 3rd year only.

Newcastle Boys' and Girls' High Schools each went to fifth year at the end of which a successful pass at the Leaving Certificate examination allowed entry to University, with Sydney being the nearest.

The original NBHS was on the summit of the very steep Tyrell Street in Newcastle with the foundation stone of the building having been laid in 1878 and occupied a year later as a primary school.

In 1906 it became Newcastle's first High School accomodating both boys and girls.

It was not until 1930 when the new high school for girls was opened that the "School on the Hill" could become Newcastle Boys' High School.

The buildings of this school were a mixture of significant single story Gothic style sandstone and bricks, now probably heritage listed, and demountables.

My first year was spent in a classroom in the main building but when it rained the roof leaked.

No 43 issue of the school magazine, "The Novocastrian", contains a very humorous illustrated poem by a teacher entitled "The House that Jack Built" highlighting this particular problem.(see attachment)

The same issue includes a comment that the Directors of Education from the States of Australia visited Newcastle with the first call to be Newcastle Boys' High but they failed to call.(any wonder why?)

Equally poor were the demountables where the floor boards had shrunk leaving full length gaps between them which in winter time we filled with old newspapers to keep the cold breezes out.

Playgrounds were non existent as they had all been overtaken by demountable classrooms one of which my class 2A occupied in 1933 and also my 3A for its final term "on the hill" in 1934.

Despite the number of demountables which had been erected and the moving of the girls to their own High School enrolment of boys was such that from 1931 on fourth year needed to be accommodated in four demountables in the grounds of Newcastle Technical College in Hunter Street Newcastle West. Here they had their own problems with noise from both front and rear and with the playground being described as "the Hunter Street footpath."

This "Annex" had its own teaching staff of between 5 and 8 with the main school having about thirty.

To attend "Boys' High" I caught the train from Waratah Station which was close to two kilometres from my home and to which I needed to walk except for those times when friends of the family living near the station allowed me to park my pushbike at their home.

However there were afternoons when I went to retrieve the bike which had been locked away safely I found that the friends were not at home which meant an indefinite and unhappy delay for me.

There was an alternate means of transport by tram from Mayfield which would have been about half a kilometre closer to home but without a place to leave a pushbike.

Of greater importance was the cost which would have been a penny each way each day in the tram with cost by rail being free. The arrangement with rail was that at the start of each term, or year it may have been, a ticket costing one shilling (10c) was purchased from the rail station's ticket office and at the end of the term- or year-it was handed back in and the shilling recovered.

The significance of saving the pennies was that we were in the middle of a depression which is now known as "the big depression" because of the severity of same compared with recent depressions- 29% unemployment against recently maybe about 8% or less and when sixpence (5c) bought a pound of sausages (6 sausages), a quart (1200ml) of full cream milk-(skim not heard of then), or 6lb (2.5kg) of potatoes.

Of special notice is that only a couple of years earlier I had been catching a bus from the Tighes Hill school to the street in Mayfield West where I lived with this bus having started from Newcastle city. Unfortunately in 1931 the Newcastle District Transport Trust decided that the buses, being privately owned, could no longer pick up passengers on government tram routes and could only run "feeder services" so bus services to the city ceased.

The feeder service from Tourle Street Mayfield West, maybe a quarter mile from Werribi Street, terminated at Tighes Hill whilst those from the southern suburbs terminated at Broadmeadow. Travelling to school on the trains were countless children but I cannot recall ever seeing a teacher on one so I guess teachers had the funds needed for the trams which most likely ran close to their homes whilst the tram stop at the foot of Brown Street Newcastle was much closer to the school than the rail stations.

From Newcastle station it meant a walk up either Watt or Bolton street or if leaving the train at the then existing Honeysuckle Station near Steele Street it meant a longer walk and a climb up Tyrell street.

There was an initiation ceremony performed on most newcomers to the school which was being dropped over the side brick fence of the school into Bathurst Burr bushes. Bathurst Burrs were about the size of a grape and very prickly.

I escaped that problem as after one day at school I missed the next two weeks with a brother having contracted a communicable disease. As no help was given towards recovering the lessons of that time my results in the June examination were very poor but were recovered in later tests.

In later years that younger brother went on to spend 4th and 5th years at "Boys' High" whilst later on my youngest brother spent the whole of his five high school years at the school.

The schoolrooms were of adequate size comfortably seating 44 students in twin wooden desks of the style where the back of each seat joined with the table of the two students behind. The desks had a shelf underneath and contained inkwells as it was before the days of biros. Blackboards were of the simple style and used extensively by some teachers.

There was neither heating nor cooling in any classroom I was in.

Being depression times the school maintained a pool of used text books and my class was provided with those needed for each subject except a French Grammar by Jones which cost 4/0 (40c) and as my parents did not have the funds to buy one I had to survive first year without. They eventually bought it for me for the start of second year but unfortunately a new teacher would have nothing to do with text books and had us copy everything from the blackboard.

There was a school uniform which my family and many others could not afford whilst attending the school but for the Old Boys Reunion dinners I have acquired a school tie. There was no disadvantage in not having a uniform whilst at the school.

One of the teachers I remember most is the one in first year who taught us Latin and whose face would redden with rage when he was disturbed by a lad talking and for which he ordered homework of writing out "The virtues of silence" a great number of times. Of greater significance is the teacher of English I feel we had in both 2nd and 3rd years and who, I believe, taught us to write (hopefully) correct grammar which I appreciate very much. I am also very conscious of his emphasis on "never use a big word where a little one will take its place" which is something I wish scribes of and in particular writers to, the press would practice. Too often I need to refer to a dictionary to obtain the meaning of some word unknown to me which has appeared in the press only to find a common word meaning the same. The feeling then becomes that the writer "is showing off"-or is it showing a "weakness" of mine?

As it was before the days when carrying loads on backs is encouraged many of us had heavy second hand kit bags made all the more heavy with the inclusion daily of text and exercise books for eight subjects, lunch and when needed raingear. The exceptions were one day a week on which a double period of one subject was programmed and the day of the week which included a sports afternoon

For my three years at the school we had the very quiet Mr Charles Christmas as Headmaster.

Our school day started at 9.00am with three 40 minute periods, a 10 minute break, two more periods, an hour for lunch followed by three 40 minute periods so as to finish at 3.30pm . The exception was on Wednesday when the afternoon was for sport. The compulsory subjects studied were English, History, Geography, Mathematics I, and II, French, Elementary Science, together with an option of either Latin or Commercial subjects. However I was unaware of the option and was led into the A class which took Latin. One lad in the A class was allowed to take Greek in lieu of History.

My favourite subjects were Mathematics I and II because I did better in those than the other subjects and that expertise has stood me in good stead in my working life.

I am unaware of any behaviour which called for harsh punishment but if memory is correct if any caning was called for it was carried out by the deputy headmaster.

In my own case I was and still am a very reluctant reader of fiction, so, as a particular school year was coming to an end and I had not finished reading the novel which formed part of the English curriculum I was called upon to stand outside the teachers' room each playtime and lunchtime until I finished it.

There were two sets of annual fees-one for the P&C at 1/0 (one shilling=10c) per parent-and another at 10 shillings and sixpence (\$1.05) per student-or family-unsure now also purpose of same not in memory. As it was recognised that many would have trouble paying this bigger amount we were advised that part payments would be accepted before classes any Monday morning. On a number of Mondays I took in a sixpence (5c) for which the Deputy Headmaster wrote out an official receipt for same. I was never able to pay the full amount.

I belonged to Smith House with the house to which one was allocated being established by the first letter of the surname. I have no memory of any colours being allocated to the Houses.

I am unaware of who put the bi-annual school books called "The Novocastrian" together but assume it was the teachers. Each year we were asked to provide articles for some many of which were printed. I have kept close at hand the five issued in my time at the school and have enjoyed rereading them and at times collating some statistics from them. More importantly though is that they are reminders of a most significant part of my life and where I was provided with the basic skills needed to have achieved the successes I have with the main one probably being that of being an independent retiree at age 93—94 on 25 th March 2014.

I have been advised that for many of the early years at the Waratah school these were not published. Whilst I believe the Old Boys' Association has copies of the issues I hold I understand that it would be happy to have any additional ones so those I have are being included with the other memorabilia I am passing over to it. In one issue of the Novocastrian the school song was shown in four languages which could have been for the possible interest of students studying one of the languages.

The significance of "Climbing" up the hill in the school song I believe is -or would be-because students came by tram or train. I have no recollection of any boy ever being delivered by a parent. The Novocastrian May 1933 page 4 includes "the slope of which whether you approach it from Tyrell Street, Brown Street, or Watt Steet is not less than one in three,.....has served for many an excuse for lateness, has kept many an ageing teacher young, and many a young teacher old...." The Novocastrian No 44 page 47 includes "... we carried to and from school, our bags heavily laden with books...."

The school motto Remis Velisque converts to "With Oars and Sails" and I guess was to encourage us to make every effort to reach our goals as is needed when in a vessel on open water..

When the school moved to Waratah years one two and four started there in the first term of 1934. The "examination classes", then 3rd and 5th years, which were to have their major examinations at the end of the year were held back and did not move to Waratah until the start of the second term. On arrival a nice new double storey brick building with a substantial assembly hall was found together with the most spacious level grounds and playing fields and adjacent to Waratah Park. Trams to Newcastle and Waratah passed the school and Waratah railway station was just a few minutes walk away on level ground-a great position!

I left school at the end of third year because there was never a thought or consideration of my doing otherwise. I had no ambition for any career path. My mother would ask-"Do you want to be an accountant"-or some such- to which I would answer "what's that?" as in those days the work experience programs of today did not exist. All we had was a couple of hours a week for a short time learning wood carving for which we had to travel from Mayfield West to Tighes Hill Primary School. Mother would follow up with "You can do anything you like except go out with your father" Reason for that would have been because he was an electrical contractor with virtually no work during the depression. The family was existing on Government food coupons called the "dole" as there were no Government cash payments then. There were many families in the same situation.

After leaving school I maintained a friendship with classmate Frank Robinson who lived in Helen Street Merewether with most of our communication being by mail. However this came to an end most likely because of wartime activity which started 5 years after finishing school.

Whilst actively seeking whatever job was available I attended Newcastle Business College until a position for 3 weeks as a messenger boy on a pushbike became available-which was gladly accepted. However the sick boy I was replacing returned after two weeks and instead of being paid off I was sent to counter sales where I stayed for two years until I learned that the firm was about to be liquidated

From there I moved to a newly established business which included in its product range ball and roller bearings. Following a wartime interruption and return to this firm an opportunity to spend time in Sydney for training in this product range was taken up. However on return the promises made for the targets achieved were not honoured so in 1955 I resigned to open Newcastle's first stand alone ball and roller bearing business as a sole trader with the name - "Northern Bearing Supplies"-later Pty Ltd. A branch was opened in Tamworth in 1959-Tamworth's first specialty bearing business. In 1960 the bearing company with which I had trained in Sydney decided to open a branch in Newcastle, approached me with an offer to buy my outlets, and included a salary package as manager- which was accepted. Name-Bearing Service Holdings Limited Unfortunately that contract did not include specific salary adjustments and these were found to be rare and minimal to the extent that in 1968 to support my growing family I started Muswellbrook's first stand alone Spare Parts business operated by a manager whilst I continued managing the bearing business.

In 1969 my employers arranged and paid for me to attend a "Course for Executives" living in at the University of New South Wales for a month-Sessions-5 days at 9am to 9pm-Saturdays 9am to 3.30.. Some time later I was offered management of Queensland which had 12 branches and incorporated New Guinea but unbelievably the package offered, when relocation and accomodation costs were taken into account was revenue negative so the offer was declined.

This meant I remained in Newcastle managing it and branches I had opened in Maitland and Taree. In 1974 10 days prior to leaving with my family for a 4 months long service leave overseas trip my services were terminated. We continued with our trip and on return restarted a bearing business in Tamworth managed by the manager of the original Tamworth business and at the same time started court proceedings which led to some modest compensation for the untimely dismissal. A second busines to market an opposition brand of bearings was opened in Tamworth but was later incorporated into the earlier one.

The Muswellbrook business was sold to Repco in 1981and the Tamworth one to Consolidated Bearing Company in 1994 both of which are still operating.

There could be no doubt that my attendance at NBHS and the education in mathematics science and English grammar received there provided the basis and the skills needed to understand the product in which I had become involved and to communicate successfully with the owners managers and senior personnel of Australia's largest companies-also with technical staff of the bearing manufacturers when visiting their factories in various countries. Over the years there have been companies mainly from overeseas starting factories here making a limited range of bearings but with the vast spread of sizes and types required to service Australia's needs our volumes have not been great enough for the survival of any one .My attendance at Newcastle Business College for several months in 1935, whilst seeking work, would also have assisted in the accounting side of business.

I became involved with Newcastle Boys' High School Old Boys Association through attendance at its Annual Dinner starting from 1990 with the object being the pleasure of fraternising with students of my time but in addition with those of other times with whom I have since become acquainted but rarely see during the year and this object has been achieved.

However there is a disappointment in that only once did a member of my class attend any dinner I attended and he has since passed away.

It has brought a special benefit on those occasions when my youngest brother has been able to make the trip from Melbourne to join the middle brother (now passed away) and me at the dinner.

The OBA's activities consist of awarding prizes of books or money for:- academic achievement, school equipment, participation by students in science experiments and activities, towards the installation of the 'Famous Faces' panels at Newcastle High School, and towards the restoration of an old boys war-grave site at Paschendale.

Funds come from income generated by investments and from donations by "Old Boys" of the school. The main function which involves all members who are able to attend is the annual dinner when those ex-students who are celebrating their 50th year since leaving are honoured together with the attendance of and address given by an old boy who has become an outstanding Australian citizen.

Newcastle Boys' High School has undoubtedly had a beneficial effect on the city with many of its students either remaining here and/or returning after University attendance and setting up businesses or practices of various professions with others obtaining significant senior positions. A fine example is that of Mr Paul Jeans having been General Manager of BHP, Chairman of Newcastle Port Corporation and currently (2014 on) Chancellor of Newcastle University.

From data supplied by the Historical Committee of the NBHS Old Boys' Association I have been able to research the Intermediate Certificate Results of the year I sat for that examination. The reason for doing so was that when at Boys' High I really felt that I was struggling against very strong competition and brilliant classmates but now when I look back on my working life I see that an amazing number of staff I have trained have copied my example, entered business on their own accounts in the same industry and been highly successful.

Joining my Newcastle staff after 4th year at school one now has two local outlets plus two in Queensland whilst a Tamworth lad who started after the old Intermediate Certificate also has two, one of which operates from a most imposing building, in Tamworth.

In referring to those results it was found that in my A class the average number of A passes per student was 3.3 whereas my score was 2. I was one of 25 -in a class of 44-who passed in all subjects. However the average number of A passes in B and C classes was less than one.

Results in 1AC (Commercial subjects in lieu of Latin) were an average of 1.07 As with only 8 passing in all subjects.

Given these details it is now obvious that I was "struggling" against a very high standard and it appears that had I realised my capabilities were probably better than I felt they were and if economic conditions had been better my career path could well have been a lot different to what it has been.

Nonetheless, given the conditions of the time and my family's situation which would also have applied to many other students and their families, continuing on to gain admission to university would have been useless as attendance at same, especially with the nearest at that time being in Sydney, could not have been funded.

Having started on that particular research it has led me into looking at other statistics to find some very interesting items for example the changes over my three years at the school in the makeup of the classes. Over that period several students were shifted from the A class to a lower one and a few went the reverse way. Interchanges between the A B & C classes and 1AC were minimal.

At times students other than the 164 who started early 1932 were introduced as 169 sat for the December 1932 examination after which numbers fell dramatically with the year end examination numbers being:-1933 - 133, 1934 - 125.

Of that 125 122 had started early 1932 which means there was a drop off of 42 of the originals.. One wonders why the drop off- could the reason for some have been "the climb up the hill"?

I carry on with "Remis Velisque"

Newcastle Boys' High School



Report on Oscar Westbury
 for the Half-year ending Dec 15, 1932
 Year First Number in Year 169 Position in Year 16

SUBJECT	Percentage obtained in Examination	Average Percentage of Year	Position in Year	REMARKS
English	67	53	30	Very fair li
History	62	52	34	
Latin	85	54	11	Very good. AHP.
French	34	59	126	Must try harder CD.
Maths. I	68	58	49	
Maths. II	91	41	1	Excellent result. R.D.G.
Elementary Science	80	57	16	
Business Principles				
Shorthand				
Geography	58	43	28	

Conduct Good Progress Good Attendance 176 13 days

REMARKS :

Chas. Christmas Headmaster.

Newcastle Boys' High School



Report on Oscar E. Westbury
 for the Half-year ending 14 Dec. 1933.
 Year II Number in Year 133 Position in Year 21

SUBJECT	Percentage obtained in Examination	Average Percentage of Year	Position in Year	REMARKS
English	78	59	7	Good
History	59	52	57	Fair
Latin	62	61	54	Very fair
French	61	52	51	Very fair
Maths. I	84	59	14	Very good
Maths. II	78	57	24	Good
Elementary Science	83	57	9	Very good
Business Principles				
Shorthand				
Geography	69	50	11	Very fair

Conduct Good Progress Very fair Attendance 10 days abs.

REMARKS :

Chas H Christmas Headmaster.

Newcastle Boys' High School



Report on Oscar E. Westbury
 for the Half-year ending 30th. June 1933.
 Year Second Number in Year 136 Position in Year 30

SUBJECT	Percentage obtained in Examination	Average Percentage of Year	Position in Year	REMARKS
English	65	56	33	V. Fair
History	53	41	29	Fair
Latin	36	58	84/112	Unsatisfactory
French	26	40	103	Unsatisfactory
Maths. I	88	63	9	V. Good
Maths. II	72	46	8	Good
Elementary Science	76	57	10	Good
Business Principles				
Shorthand				
Geography	68	42	11	V. Fair

Conduct Good Progress V. Fair Attendance 11 days abs.

REMARKS : Language work must be improved

Chas. Chrusmas Headmaster.



NEW SOUTH WALES
 Department of Education
 Intermediate Certificate

IT IS HEREBY CERTIFIED THAT

OSCAR EDWARD WESTBURY

of NEWCASTLE BOYS' HIGH SCHOOL has
 satisfactorily followed an approved Secondary School
 Course covering at least two years' work and has passed a
 written examination in the undermentioned EIGHT subjects:-

ENGLISH	"B"	HISTORY	"B"
GEOGRAPHY	"B"	MATHEMATICS I	"A"
MATHEMATICS II	"A"	LATIN	"B"
FRENCH	"B"	ELEMENTARY SCIENCE	"B"

gab

W.C. Mackinnon

J.A. Thomas

CHIEF INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS

DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

Dated at Sydney, this *first* day of *March* 1935.

NOTE - The letter A indicates a first-class pass, B a second-class pass,
 and 0 a pass in the oral test.

Newcastle Boys' High School



TELEPHONE
NEWCASTLE 875

Waratah, 330

Waratah,
~~Newcastle~~

12th Nov. 1932

Oscar Westbury has been a pupil of this school for three years.

He has always been a well-behaved, gentlemanly boy, of good address and courteous manner.

He possesses good ability and would give satisfaction to anyone who should employ him.

Chas. Christmas,
Headmaster.