

NHS Recollections (anonymous)

The following are wonderful recollections of school life in the second decade of last century. Page 1 is unfortunately missing.

These pages seem to be part of the research notes for Audrey Armitage's book 'Newcastle High School - The First 75 Years'.

-2-

Gauze masks had to be worn over nose and mouth when travelling in trains and trams and not to do so was regarded as a heinous offence, because of the danger of infecting others. I don't know what gas or antiseptic was used, but before school, pupils were encouraged to go to the Science Lab. where the Science Teachers used to spray our throats. During the Epidemic, many pupils assisted their local Municipal Councils in distributing soup to families, temporarily struck down by 'Flu, sometimes called then Spanish 'Flu. It was a virulent disease causing many deaths.

When I first went to N.H.S. in 1915, Mr. Smith was Headmaster, but I think he was transferred at the end of the year. He was followed by Mr. Williams who was there for three years, I think, and Mr. Saxby was Headmaster in 1919. His daughter, Irene was in my year, passed the Leaving Certificate in 1919, as I did, and came down to the University of Sydney also. Grace Walker (Dawson) did ~~so~~ as well as quite a number of the boys, including Bill Cooksey and Tom Henery.

Many teachers stand out vividly in my memory: Mr. Schleicher and Mr. Scouler, who taught Latin, Miss Josephine Niau and Miss Ada Long who taught French, Mr. "Jimmy" Hayes, who was Deputy-Head and taught English and History, Miss Brewin (History), Miss Bradford (English), Mr. "Jerry" Gibson and Mr. Hector Walker, teachers of Maths. Mr. Walker was then tall. That year, 1919, Miss Whiteoak and Miss Ross were probably doing their first year teaching, and Miss Joseph and Miss Batty wouldn't have been much ahead of them! I've several times spoken of Fifth Year, but actually when I commenced at N.H.S. the course was a Four Year one with the Leaving Certificate at the end of Fourth Year.

There were no Ocean Baths in Newcastle then, so swimming was conducted in the Old Bogey Hole, and when one compares its size with that of the modern Olympic Pool, one realises the problems that competitions presented. Louie Bickerton, was, I think, the most outstanding swimmer in my time.

Hockey was introduced as a sport in about 1918 as one of the Winter Sports for girls and was enthusiastically played. Normally, we played as school groups, but twice a season we had matches with Maitland Girls' High School and these were the big events. I think it was Miss Batty who coached us, but I'm not certain, after the lapse of years. We didn't have School Uniforms in those days or Sports' Outfits, and we played the game in skirts and blouses or jumpers and wore Boots to protect our ankles - very different now!

Basket-ball and Tennis were also played by girls and were very popular.

"Beach-Teas" at the end of term, especially in Summer, were fun for us. On the beach were big shelter-sheds with tables, and there after school, class picnics would be held, with some kind, understanding teacher in charge. The girls would come laden with cakes and sandwiches made by themselves or helpful families and with soft drinks, everyone thoroughly enjoyed the meal. Thermoses were not then in vogue, so cool drinks sufficed. There weren't radios to entertain, and gramophones were rare, so games were played. To-day, they would be regarded as very tame, but "Drop the Handkerchief" and "The Grand old Duke of York" and various Ring Games and competitions amused us quite happily. The party would break up usually when it got dark.

An End of the Year School Picnic was often held by classes in the care of the Class teacher. Sugarloaf was the spot, my class from time to time, chose, but because of weather conditions, I never reached it during my school days, and it was only a few years ago that I eventually set foot on it! Strange when I think how many years had elapsed since my schooldays.

We had an excellent School Choir, first under the training of Mr. Murphy and later after he was transferred from N.H.S., of Mr. Gibson, both of whom were most enthusiastic and succeeded in making all the members of the choir keen too. At the end of the year, at Speech Night, it played an important part in the evening's proceedings. From time to time there would be a School Concert and the Choir's repertoire was quite extensive, with lots of excerpts from Grand Opera.
