

BARR, Jim – Renowned Swimmer; Year of '53 - OBITUARY

25 January 1937 - 19 November 2021

The following are recollections from Old Boy John McKenzie on learning of the death of Jim Barr.

25/11/21

Sad news.

I haven't spoken to Jim for ages and often wondered how he was.

He *did* continue into 5th year at NBHS but left, before the year was out, probably before the Annual 5th Year Dinner on 29/10/53 (he is not named among the Departing Fifth Year Students in the Dinner Program).

In 5th Year, he was with us long enough to win a Blue, for swimming, for that year. He and Allan Charlton put in tremendous performances at the CHS Carnival in Sydney but they each ran into Fort Street's affable but brilliant, powerful, skilful and soon to be famous *Jon Henricks* - so did everyone else in the Senior (open) Division - see the link, below, of the 2nd day.

Largely thanks to Jim and Allan (who won his backstroke final) we came second to Fort Street in that division. In the freestyle relay Allan, Bruce Nickisson, Grahame Burns and Jim came second, actually beating Fort Street into third place. We also won the inaugural Medley Relay.

I remember Jim and Allan and Mr. Frank Sheriff (the ATC Staff-Sgt) and Mr. (Herb) Fountain discussing how to win the Medley.

From the Infants school Jim and I went through The Junction - often in the same class. He was always likeable, fairly quiet but enjoyed fun. He was modest, not showy and tended to deliver without bravado. In plotting that relay he knew that he had to swim the final, freestyle leg and he knew that he needed to go into that lap with a good lead if he were to hold Jon Henricks at bay. He went about the discussion with a kind of frank realism, a practical modesty. He was, after all, a Champion but he knew that Jon H was a faster Champion over all distances. (I think that it was the day before that he had also beaten Jim, who had every reason to like his chances, in the 880 yards race.)

Well, the braintrust decided that we had to break Fort Street in the breast-stroke and butterfly legs so Allan gave up his favoured, opening, backstroke leg to Ross Williams and took the butterfly leg. Ross was then up against the current Australian Junior Backstroke Champion. I think that Ross swam the race of his life to keep in touch - a great lap. When I dived in Fort St's lead was a narrow one so the switch had begun to pay off. Two legs later, when Allan had finished his lap, Jim had enough of a lead to hold-out Jon H and we won.

Sorry if this is a bit of a ramble but my point is *Jim Barr's character*. He was a fellow who never went into a pool without intending to win and I thought that it took steely honesty and courage for him to discuss coolly, earnestly and equably how his team could overcome the fact that without a fair lead he could not beat his great competitor over his leg of the race.

Below is a photo of him from 1949 - at Newcastle Station en route to Sydney for the first of his CHS Swimming Carnivals.

Jim continued swimming after school, I gather. Was it mainly in the surf? Others can speak to that.

He was a good footballer, Penton. Did you know? In the under 7-7's he played Rugby League in 1st year (and very well) but after that his swimming coach advised him not to play if he was serious about swimming (which he was).

Three years later, however, in 4th year, he helped us out for a game in the 2nds. There'd been an accident, we were playing the co-leaders of the comp and we were a player short. Off went Jim by taxi to his fathers pub, at Broadmeadow, to collect his football boots and back he came grinning all over his face. He's to play lock - his favoured position he said.

They won the first scrum on a piece of hard dirt known as Maitland Sports Ground. Bang! Down goes their five-eighth with Jim wrapped around his legs. Bang! Bang! Bang! They are starting to watch out for him.

Dave Madew scores a 95 yard intercept try right on half time, we tackle all afternoon on that piece of concrete and win by 1 point - 5 to 4. We look at each other exhausted - delighted to have won and lucky to have survived.

Jim, on the other hand, is a spring lamb. Clearly, he's had a very satisfying afternoon. His eyes are bright and he is going from one to another with his happy face on.

I think that it was the last game he played.

We went on to win the comp. He went back to swimming.

Discipline.

May he rest in peace.

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/18362731?searchTerm=Combined High Schools swimming>



Left to right. 1st window: *David Ward* up top. *Brown?* on the left and *Jones* on the right;
Middle window: **Jim Barr**, *John McKenzie*, ?
3rd window: ?, *Poulton*, *Terry Lewis*.

Jim does not appear in the 1953 photo but can be seen top centre in the 1952 team photo below.

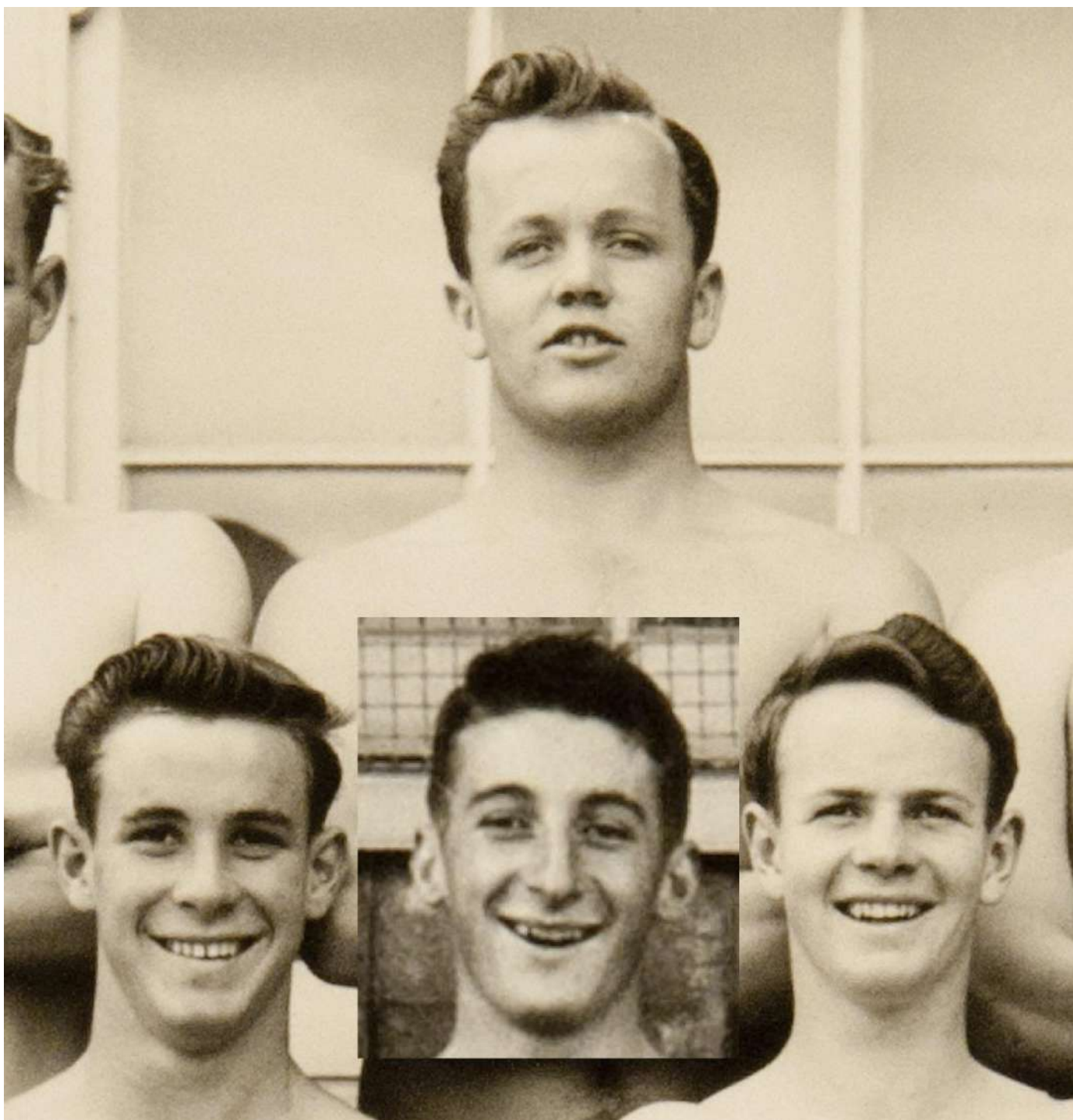
NBHS 1952 Swimming Team



Senior and Junior C.N.H.S. Champions

Back row: (l to r) V Whitaker, G Burns, B Nickisson, R Bradbury, J Barr, W Cowan, J Nicholls, J Farrell, A Carroll
Middle row: (l to r) D Ward, G Doyle, A Williams, A Charlton, J McKenzie, D Gordon, I Carling, T Street
Front row: (l to r) A Darrow, P Snelson, Mr H Fountain (Coach), Mr R McFarlane (Coach), T Harris, B Straker

The medley relay team. Jim Barr at top and, left to right: Allan Charlton, Ross Williams, John McKenzie.



SPORT

Blues Awarded, 1953

Cricket: Jack Gill, Terry Smith, Barry Wellham.

Rugby: Terry Smith, Colin Chapman, Alan Charlton, Brian Daly, Gordon Johnston, Don Keith, Kevin Miller, Bruce Nickisson, John Perkins.

Soccer: John Lloyd, Robert Morrison, Robert Taylor, William Sheehan.

Tennis: Paul Dickson, John Grey, Peter Myers, Geoff Shearman.

Athletics: Robert Bender, David Bowden, Alan Charlton, John Farrell, Gordon Johnston, Kevin Mahoney, John McKenzie, Maurice Scott.

Swimming: Jim Barr, Alan Charlton, Graham Burns, John McKenzie, Bruce Nickisson, Ross Williams.