

New Farm State School

2-Aug-21

Random memories

My primary school years 1937-1944 were all spent as a pupil at New Farm State School. Joining the school at the beginning of school life, most of us completed primary schooling with the same classmates from beginning to end. There was little mobility of families especially in the war years.

From Lower Bowen Terrace, I walked more than 2.5kms each way, to and from school, taking almost the same route each day – along Sydney St. to James St, across Merthyr Road and up the hill to the school. Public transport was confined to trams which did not go near the school and there were no bus routes. I have no recollection of riding my bike or of bikes at the school. There were no parent pickups, there were few private cars and petrol was rationed at 4 gallons per month.

The school day began with ‘parade’ on the James Street side of the 2 story main building. The Headmaster would stand on the 1st floor verandah with the Australian flag at the masthead on the flagpole on the ground below and he would command:

‘Eyes to the flag, Salute the flag’.

After the day’s notices from the Headmaster, children then used designated staircases to access classrooms and to avoid congestion.

The school boundaries at that time were James Street, Heal Street, Hawthorne Street, and Annie Street. Not sure that Hawthorne was a through street and school history shows that part of Hawthorne Street has subsequently been taken over from MRD, and that general area is now a playing ground.

The only play area I remember was between the school buildings and the Hawthorne St boundary and it was a stony hard area with not a blade of grass or a single tree. I have a recollection of only one tree somewhere on the whole site, and that’s where class photos were taken. In the Heal Street/Hawthorne St corner there was one cricket net and apart from the tennis court which I don’t remember ever seeing in use, no sporting facilities or organised sport or sports teams come to mind.

We did have daily exercises out on that play area and for some reason I remember tunnel ball!

As I remember, playground activities were mostly marbles and cigarette cards for boys, and skipping and hopscotch for girls. Most boys carried a little bag of marbles of which the best one was a 'taw'- the most accurate. I struggle to remember the various marble games, the most common was probably a ring with marbles in the centre to be shot out with a taw, winner take all.

Cigarette cards were in most packets of cigarettes and when I think about it, everyone in my household was a smoker, mother, grandmother, great aunt. Grandfather smoked a pipe. The cards were in series, British soldiers, aviators, cricketers, Red Indians, explorers. Similar cards were in breakfast foods especially Kelloggs. Generally there was some reward when the entire series was collected and there may even have been little booklets to paste each card until the collection was complete. When used for playing games, and only one game comes to mind, to play against a wall where probably the winner would land his card closest to or furthest from the wall. The card was held between the 1st and middle finger and flicked so it would sail out on its way.

The area I remember where the games were played was at the rear of the toilet block which was on the James Street boundary and not at all to teacher's liking.

A strong recollection of that stony play area was the drill rehearsal for the grand parade at the annual Fancy Dress Ball. Memory says it went on for hours on days preceding the Ball, in hot sun, and it was choreographed so that participants paraded 4/8/2 abreast and merged or demerged – round and round like a superior military parade, with children who did not quite get it!

The Fancy Dress Ball was a big occasion each year and was held in a ballroom or hall in Brunswick Street, Fortitude Valley opposite the old Waltons Store or the Valley train station. There were several costume hire shops which did good business and boys traditionally went as cowboys, sailors or Grenadier Guards, and girls dressed up as Queens or Princesses and with a chance to wear make-up. With prizes for various categories, I do remember one year where the winner went dressed as a Traffic Light – black and yellow striped outfit and carrying a set of lights which actually worked. His father was an electrical engineer. Traffic lights were first installed in Brisbane in 1936 and were still a novelty in early years.

Great excitement one year when police arrested an Italian selling home made Gelati from his bicycle vendor cart, probably @ 1 penny per cone, at the back gate to Hawthorne St.

There was an annual fete from which toffee cupcakes are a memory.

It was probably around 1942 when the school acquired an 8 or 16mm projector. An open area between posts under the school was enclosed to make a theatre.

We had regular sessions there although the only memory is of a BBC propaganda film, warning of dangers of loose talk in public places – like a pub – as there could be enemy spies listening.

Despite these being war years, with a big military presence in Brisbane and New Farm particularly – with USNaval personnel close by in the wharf area - I have no recollection of ever seeing a military uniform anywhere about the school. On only one occasion do I remember an air raid warning with sirens sounding, where we all had to take refuge in the slit trenches dug out on the tennis court. As we waited for the next development I can still see clearly a lone aircraft at high altitude flying overhead. It was a friendly.

Many of us had Commonwealth Bank bankbooks and moneyboxes in the classic shape of a bank and surely a valuable artifact today. On banking day we came with our sixpences or more for deposit and updating of our bankbook.

In the war years there were War Savings Bonds and again we bought each week a sixpenny or one shilling stamp or stamps which were pasted in a little folder and when it reached £1 the folder was exchanged for a War Savings Bond. One day my friend from around the corner brought £50 to school and some concern/horror for his safety was expressed for carrying this amount of cash.

Pocket money – if any – was never enough and I was envious of a classmate who was a paper-boy walking the streets calling ‘Paper, Paper’ and for which he was paid tuppence per dozen papers sold.

The name of my teacher in 4th or 5th grade is forgotten and I remember him as a quiet and calm man who used to sing to us in class. What a surprise to read one day in the Courier Mail that he had inherited the title of Lord Iveagh. Regrettably I cannot find the article which I thought I had and the internet tells that the title came from the Guinness Brewery family. No idea where this story went.

A vague memory of woodwork classes for boys, and for girls there was ‘home science’ or something similar where girls were taught to cook and to sew so that they would grow up to be good housewives! Memory of spending a lot of time learning to draw a map of Australia, and a subject called Civics – the very basics of how the community works. And a memory of a teacher asking the class to break the silence after the passage of a minute and the extraordinary inaccuracies resulting.

Folding doors between 2 classrooms enabled several classes to be gathered together from time to time for some special event. One such event was the visit of an RAAF ‘war hero’ back from bombing raids in Europe. Great excitement although my recollection is that it all fell flat as he had us all drawing maps – for

navigation. The following day the C-M reported that a man had been arrested and it was our war hero who was in fact an imposter.

Another annual or 6 monthly visit was from a singing teacher and I remember with horror how before the assembled classes he singled out one boy and said 'Your voice will earn you money one day ----- collecting bottles'!

Another occasional visit was from an acting troupe who would stage a little play. I was entranced when I saw the actor gather a cape around him and appear to descend stairs – through the classroom floor.

There were annual visits from the State Health Department and each pupil was subject to a medical examination of sorts conducted no doubt by a nurse. Which makes me think that this was in the days of doctor's home visits and I cannot remember any GP rooms anywhere in New Farm.

I think most of the school population was non-Catholic as there was a Catholic primary school not far away – in Villiers Street. The original handwritten school register is available online and shows a column for Religious Denomination and entries are predominantly 'E.C.' which looks to be CofE. Others are P, M, Jew, RC.

Interesting to see that teachers still use merit stamps which was the practice back then and for which some of us might have expected some parental reward and especially for 'Special Merits'.

Punishment is vague, I think the teacher would bring an unruly pupil to the front of the class, or if really bad, be sent to stand outside the classroom for a time. Was standing in the corner with a dunce's cap in use? Not sure. Serious misdemeanours were referred to the Headmaster who seemed to be the only one who would administer the cane – known as 'the cuts'! Delivered to an outstretched hand and a maximum of 6 stokes – the cuts! On rare occasions only.

There was no school uniform although shoes had to be worn. Some children would come to school barefoot probably because we were all barefoot at home, rather than because of the cost of a pair of shoes.

I am stretched to remember anything about 'gangs' but there were the beginnings of such and maybe I was a gang leader? What did we do, except to gather friends – nothing! Maybe marbles. I think another such gang had more 'tough guys' than my gang. This aberration could only have come from movies or comic books. There was a series called 'Our Gang'.

There was no tuck shop and I don't believe children were permitted to leave school grounds, except possibly to go to a little shop on the corner of James and

Annie St – opposite the mysterious Macedonian Orthodox Church. This was mainly a sweets shop and whenever I had a few pennies I would buy a cream bun which I think cost tuppence. The shop also did good business with fireworks around Guy Fawkes Day which has almost disappeared. Catherine wheels, sparklers, bangers, crackers, throwdowns, rockets and fountains, much more personal and no less enjoyable than today's multi million dollar displays.

Further down James St there was Garnett's produce shop where we would buy sticks of sugar cane to suck on our way home.

At the end of Grade 7 came the Scholarship Exam which as far as I know was simply a milestone and an entry requirement for Secondary School. The minimum school leaving age was then 14 years and maybe the following year it moved to 15 years. I vaguely remember one other from my year who went on to secondary school, there may have been others but very few. No memory of anyone who went on to university, only a memory of a handful from other classes who did eventually become university graduates. We were asked in class what we wanted to do and I don't remember my answer – I didn't know! One boy wanted to become a policeman and sure enough he did so and that is pretty much the only memory I have.

Looking at the school register where the occupation of a parent is shown, this cross-section of the New Farm school community was not particularly affluent, almost the contrary, higher education was expensive with only one State High school that I know of, and jobs were easy to get. No recollection of any formal career advice.

We left school with the end of WW2 almost a year away. Later years saw the changes in social structure, attitudes, and aspirations brought about by more than a decade of social upheaval with the Great Depression followed by the World War.

Ours were just the 'Olden Days'.