

The State High School

Staff: Ross Jones and Keith Allen

*Students: David Maughan, Nick Mackey,
Alice Sikkema, Alison Frazer, Abigail
Shelley, Sarah Field and Nadine Johnston.*

Newness was apparent in 1958. On the 12th February and the months that followed one could not escape it. It was not only learning expectations on the faces of the first pupils. Newness could be seen and heard. Patches of mud were to be negotiated and piles of timber avoided. Saws and hammers competed vociferously with teachers for the attention of pupils. The school was to have opened on the 4th February. It did not.

In the meantime the headmaster, Mr Bernard Mitchell, advised via the *Mercury* that he would interview parents and their offspring at the "Psychologist's Office", 307 Macquarie Street, Hobart. When the school did open, it consisted of a partially finished "A" block, with accommodation on the top floor only. School was taught in six classrooms. The seventh room, furnished in a somewhat spartan and utilitarian manner, served as the Principal's office, staffroom and bookroom.

On the first day Christopher Foster bought his books from the bookshop and retired briefly to survey the academic gems glistening within. Also, a bevy of girls (Phillis More, Margaret Volk, Kay Newton and Margaret Williams) carried their desks optimistically along the corridor and into the classroom. There was quite a lot of carrying to be done that day. Wayne Banks-Smith carried his chair, as did 200 others, out onto the flattish area north of "A" block. Here, under providentially clear skies, the teachers organised the class of 1958 into rows and ranks for the school's first assembly.

A New Type of School

The building, students and teachers were not the only new things about the school. It was an entirely new concept, being the first Comprehensive School to be built in Tasmania. Such a school was "comprehensive" in that it sought to embrace in one educational programme the different outlooks, skills and abilities that were naturally intermingled in the community.

The majority of parents had a positive

attitude towards the school and were well aware of its goal and methods. This was due to the excellent pre-publicity and parent involvement programme carried out by Dr R.L. Whitford. Not only did parents design aspects of the new school uniform, they were meaningfully involved in matters relating to the design of the school curriculum.

Fund Raising and Opening

In 1957 the first steps towards construction and fund raising for the new school had begun. An event which gained much publicity for the new school and aided this enterprise was the Queen Carnival, organised by Mr G.M. Shelley. This involved the six southern state primary schools of Princes Street, Tarooma, Kingston, Margate, Snug and Lower Sandy Bay.

Each school contributed a queen to the competition and each school kept half the money it raised. The queen who raised the most money in proportion to her school's enrolment would win the competition. The six young queens, aged between eleven and thirteen, raised funds by means of film nights, tuck shops, balls, concerts and American Teas. The winner's prize was an air trip to Sydney for five days, with expenses paid by Ansett-A.N.A.

The winner was announced by Mr Robert Cosgrove at the laying of the foundation stone on the 3rd November 1957. She was Stephenie Newbiggin of The Tarooma State Primary School.

Amongst those invited to the laying of the foundation stone were the Director General, Mr Don Tribolet, and the Minister of Education, Mr Neilson, who was unable to attend due to a prior engagement. The head teachers of all the major feeder schools were invited, along with students who would be attending the following year.

The school was opened on the 12 February 1958. Good wishes from the principals of surrounding schools were received by letters and telegrams.

The Buildings

The occupancy of the school was somewhat premature and conditions were at times trying and primitive. Not only did the inhabitants of the unfinished building have to put up with hammering and drilling, they also had to do without electricity.

“A” Block

On the 20th March 1958 electrical power was finally connected to the school. On the same day lockers were installed for the students.

By the 13th June the school had received a hot water heating system which was appreciated by all. However, the system often burst pipes or shut off for no reason, which decreased the temperature on cold days.

On the 4th August the second floor, containing the science laboratories, staffroom and offices, was finally completed. The other side of the “A” block top floor was completed at different times.

“B” Block

The plans for a second block were made in 1957, but the block was not needed until 1959. “B” block was to be of three stories, containing Home Arts, Manual Arts and Art and Craft rooms.

Construction began in late 1958 and once again was very slow. The building was badly needed for the beginning of the 1959 school year, when an intake of 430 pupils was expected.

Many troubles faced the Principal, Mr B. Mitchell because the block needed extra lighting, speakers, windows, etc. However, in March 1959 it was complete enough for students to occupy.

The Sports Grounds

The sports grounds were really constructed around the school. The first oval, the hockey oval, was properly constructed about the middle of 1959. This oval was used for running sports, soccer, hockey and cricket.

A few years later there was a need for another, larger oval. This was sited below the State Primary School and required much planning and construction. This oval was now used for cricket, with a concrete pitch in the middle, a running track and the very popular football ground.

Formative Years

The formative years were a time of challenge and innovation. Slow learners and the academically able were catered for with remedial teaching and enrichment courses. The task of ascertaining the particular needs

of individual students was made easier by the appointment of a School Guidance Officer on a permanent basis.

By 1960 the fruits of the first two years were readily apparent. The Principal, Mr Campbell, noted in his journal that, “there is a tremendous vitality in the school. . . In general this vitality is being channelled towards definite and attainable goals”. In part, this vitality was due to the fact that the staff encouraged a degree of freedom of expression amongst their pupils, and had engaged in some mild experiments in pupil self-government.

An example of the latter can be seen in the operation of the Student’s Representative Council. It not only allowed students to attempt to improve some aspects of school life, it also made rules for fellow students to follow. For example, the Council legislated that there was to be no running within school buildings, no visiting of classrooms other than one’s own unless invited, and no games whatever on the rocks. Students who disregarded this particular instruction were to be banned from the beach for a period decided by the staff. Documents enunciating the rules were signed by the President of the Council, Wayne Banks-Smith, and the Secretary, Jenny Thornhill.

Experiments in freedom of expression and self-government brought results in other ways. In 1960 Mr Campbell wrote:

The freedom of expression allowed to the first pupils in 1958 is providing a strong harvest at present, as pupils are two years older and bigger and the staffs new and inexperienced. These pupils are a delight to teachers who can handle them, and a great problem to others.

Proliferation of Clubs

One of the most vital aspects of the early years was the proliferation of clubs of all kinds. The longest running has been the Table Tennis Club. It began in 1958 with twenty seven members supervised by Mr Spaulding, now Principal of Cosgrove State High School. The first tournament was won by P. Harris. The Table Tennis Club flowered for many years until the death of Mr Ken Haines in 1984.

Sailing

A club well suited to the school’s seaside location was the Sailing Club. Hobart

Education

Technical State High School had generously donated three Sharpies to Taroom. However the essential success of the club must be attributed to the enthusiasm of the Headmaster, Mr Mitchell, and his wife. Mrs Mitchell was distinguished by the fact that she had built a Tamar Class sailing dinghy herself. She also took an active part in the club's activities, often collecting various craft in her trailer and transporting them to the school. Dr. Whitford, the Superintendent of Secondary Schools, was the Patron of the club.

The first meeting was held on the first Open Day at the end of 1958. A flotilla of craft graced the waters. There was Mrs Mitchell's Tamar, School Boat No. 1, Geoff Blackwood's Sabot, Robert Sugden's Rainbow and a maritime device, described in the school magazine, *Windward*, as Kevin Bell's "Crate". John Broughton stood by in a motor dinghy and Mr Kuipers manned the pick-up boat.

Some of the early members of the club were Wayne Banks-Smith, Geoff Pearsall, Geoff Nation, Terry Britain, John Birch and Christopher Ross.

Skiing

In August 1959 Mr Mitchell wrote in his Headmaster's Journal, "the [Skiing Club] is very strong and many talks, films and discussions have taken place throughout the year". This club, led by Mr Bolger, enjoyed several excursions to Mt. Field. In the winter of 1959 heavy snow fell on the highlands providing ideal conditions for beginners and others.

Other Clubs

There were many other clubs formed during the first two years. The Aquarium Club installed a tank in the waters below the school, complete with a pump system and denizens, such as seaweed, sponges, anemones and crayfish. Two energetic members were Leigh Dixon and David Jordan.

The Geology Club, under Mr Radel, had twenty two members. The Astronomy Club had fifty one members, with Mr Norman in charge. The Animal Club was a branch of the Junior R.S.P.C.A. There were Music, Photography and Drama Clubs.

Mr B.G. Mitchell left the school at the end of 1959.

He modestly stated a fact when he wrote in *Windward* of that year, "Although unhappy

to leave such a stimulating and vital school we have established a sound foundation for the future". To show their appreciation for his leadership, the students presented him with a pair of binoculars at the final Open Day of that year.

A large portion of the staff were also transferred at this time. In 1960 only twelve of the original teaching staff remained. The staff then stood at thirty six full-time, and two part-time teachers.

Mr N.H. Campbell became the Principal at the beginning of 1960. At this time the student population had risen to 644.

In April attempts to have the contractors remove tramcars, brought to the site during the building of "B" block, failed.

In October the names of the first prefects were announced, work began on the construction of the basketball courts and a second Cadet dinghy was purchased by the Sailing Club.

In November the Parents Advisory Council had arranged to have a servery built in the basement so that the tuckshop would no longer be held in the corridor.

Mr Campbell left the school at the end of 1965.

During his six years at Taroom...he had placed strong emphasis on the importance of study...He had seen to it that the grounds had been changed from a wilderness of weeds...to the present pleasing combination of sports grounds, lawns, gardens and trees.

Mr Campbell was replaced by Mr D.G. Lennox, and Mr K.G. Haines was appointed Vice Principal.

A highlight of 1966 was Taroom's success in the Kingston Drama Festival. After three months of preparation Mrs A. Powell staged *The Crimson Coconut* before a difficult public and won the shield. The cast consisted of Robert Potts, Flora Meerding, Mort Krupp, Regina Meerding, Ian McIndoe, Graham Hash and Robert Parker. They were somewhat surprised as "the audience was making a terrible racket and the actors were cascaded with 'Jaffas' ... the soup was spilled all over the players and the potatoes rolled off the stage."

Taroom won the Shield at the Festival for three consecutive years and this success was substantially due to the enthusiasm of the Drama teacher, Mrs Powell.

1967 Bushfires

Few pupils would forget the first day of the 1967 school year. Clouds of thick smoke blotted out the sun, producing an eerie gloom that was illuminated by showers of sparks that zoomed like tracer bullets over the trees.

The road had been cut in several places, making it impossible for many of the children to go home. Even so, an uneasy calm pervaded the school as the staff marched the students down to assembly points on the beach.

Irene Watts was forced to leave off shepherding frightened pupils.

She hurried home to find her wood heap on fire and promptly joined the bid to save the house. Luck was on her side and "home sweet home" escaped with a severe charring at one end.

Many of the children continued to be traumatised for weeks after the fires. Some pupils brought along parcels of food and donations of money for the needy. One area of the Home Arts section was turned into a repository for these donations.

For some the desire to achieve could not be consumed by mere bushfires. Ashton Denehey and his parents had their home burnt out and were forced to live in a caravan at Snug. Nevertheless he continued to appear at school with his homework meticulously done.

The year 1970 was distinguished by the official opening of the Assembly Hall and Gymnasium on the 26th October. Jenny Perkin described the events in the school magazine *Windward*:

The ceremony commenced with a stirring performance of the national anthem by the school orchestra, followed by the Trumpet Voluntary, renamed 'Jerry at Tarooma' (*sic*). Then followed a speech by Mr. Lennox, undaunted by the fact that the microphone was not operating. He proceeded to demonstrate the excellent acoustics of the hall... At the conclusion a hungry horde of parents, staff and prefects streamed down the hill to be filled to repletion by the food prepared by the Mother's Club.

Mr Lennox left at the end of 1971 and was replaced by Mr C.R.O. Barnfield. An editorial in *Windward* noted that a water pistol war between staff and students continued unabated. Mrs Anderson joined the library staff.

In 1973 Mrs Watts wrote the last of her many articles in the school magazine.

The Library

Under Irene Watts' leadership the library became a central feature of the school. Irene Watts was the library and influence of her dedicated years remains until this day. She commenced teaching at Tarooma State Primary School in 1957, while waiting for this School to be finished. Her duties in a room in the top floor of "A" block began in 1958. As well as serving as librarian, Mrs Watts taught English, Remedial English, Religious Education and was responsible for First Aid.

The first library was a "shoe box", but was warm and sunny, with delightful views. The first tables were of kindergarten height. As the boys grew older their knees banged on the table bottoms. Some found it impossible to get their legs under them.

At the end of 1958 total borrowing had been 2872 books. Chris Ross received acclaim for reading 36 books, and Barbara Watts distinction for reading 53.

While overseas Mrs Watts investigated the offerings in many bookshops and shipped the choicest editions back to the school library. As members grew, space in the library became more cramped. In 1964 Mrs Watts wrote prophetically,

It has become more apparent that there should be a much larger library with a reading room, a smaller study and reference room, plus an adequate office and work room.

Mrs Watts repeatedly called for more adequate library facilities, especially with the increase in acquisitions following Commonwealth Grants in 1969. In 1972 she noted that the advent of the new Social Science course, and similar developments in other subject areas, had made the need for a larger library acute. Her vision was not realised until 1977, with the opening of the new library, known as the Resource Materials Centre.

If the library was a source from which people gathered information, it was also a reservoir from which they drew comfort: from the elements on cold wet days, and from the library staff any day. On wet days the milling throng would reach 150 and Mrs Watts would be assisted by a student "bouncer". On fine days the library still did its job as a shelter for

