

Beaumaris Primary School: 1935-43

by Ray Garnett, member of [Beaumaris Conservation Society Inc](#), June 2014

My initial home was at 50-52 Cromer Road, Beaumaris. My mother (my father had died before I was born), my brother Wally, 13, and myself, 6-7 years old, rented an old home on an acre (4,000 square metres) of land. The [night-man](#) didn't come, so we (my sisters, Nora and Phyllis, were well married by now) buried our toilet pan residue in the ground. The land had two in-ground wells and a windmill. I had a mains water supply, and also a large water tank on the south side of the house.

To get to the present site of the school, relocated [from its original site](#), and called Beaumaris State School until the 1980s, I had to walk across an 'open common', a flat grassy area where they used to grow oats for the '[Horse Tram](#)', then through tea tree and wattle bushland to the school. We emerged from the bushland to be at the front gate of the school, isolated from any signs of houses, flanked by bracken, tea tree, an orchard, and scattered bush, quiet and remote. When I first went to school, the old wooden school was up the back near the shelter shed until it was carted away.

Other pupils appeared from along various bush tracks, and from either end of an [unmade Dalgetty Road](#), some from Black Rock south of Balcombe Road. They are from a relaxed life with no hustle and bustle. While I was not a brilliant student, I was able to complete and get through most school work satisfactorily.

We must remember that the large school room was divided by a sliding partition. The school averaged about 40 pupils. On the north side were Grades 1-4, and on the south side were Grades 5-8. The last Grade 8 was the Merit Grade. A number of children often left after Grade 6 to go on to higher education schools, High Schools, Technical Schools, and Grammar Schools. I remained to complete Merit Grade (probably by the skin of my teeth).

There were four rows of desks in each room. Each row of four desks usually represented a grade. I believe this part of the present school is now a toilet block. It seems to me that a part of history has been destroyed and lost forever. The old brick building was the school. The main entrance (south) entered a corridor. On the right was the Headmaster's office. At the far end were hand washing facilities and basins, and to the right were facilities for hanging clothes and school bags, etc.

The school grounds had a long line of tall pine trees on the right (north side), and a large tea tree hedge at the back of the shelter shed and cricket pitch, with more pine trees down the south side, and a number of gums and pine trees on the Dalgetty Road frontage.

At the back of the large tea tree hedge at the back, through a small gate was another large area of ground where jonquils were planted in rows. We seldom entered that area. I remember that one year we planted and grew jam melons there. My only photograph of me at school as a child is where I am holding one of them. If there were any other photographs, they were probably destroyed when our home burned down in the [1944 Beaumaris bushfire](#), as was everything else, but that is another story.

School discipline was firm, with either the 'cuts' from a leather strap on the hands, or around the legs, or a rap on the knuckles with a ruler in the lower grades. It was fair justice. I remember one teacher, Miss Holland, used to grab me by the ear and take me out in front of the grade in the lower grades.

My class size probably varied from 3 to 4 to 6. Some times in the higher grades there could be two, or one only. School subjects were probably, arithmetic, mental and practical, Grammar, Dictation, Composition, Recitation, Geography, History, Singing, Poetry, and Algebra in the last years. Sport was cricket, but because of the small number of older children it was not possible to field a full team of many sports. Special Days: there were probably such outings, except one, which I will not relate. We had swings and see-saws to play on, and I remember a circular spinning frame, which you and other kids spun around as fast as they could to make those on it slide off.

I recall that the poliomyelitis epidemic in the late 1930s had a great impact on School life, owing to the fact that we weren't allowed to go to school, as it was contagious. We received our school work through the mail, and then when finished we returned it by the same process. From memory I was very slack in completing most subjects.

With an orchard next to the school, we often 'accidentally' hit or kicked the ball over the strand wire fence into the fruit trees! Most boys volunteered to help find it. We sometimes got the 'cuts' if we got caught. I remember Mr Clayton, the owner of the fruit and rhubarb property next door, coming to the school and telling the children and the teacher, that he would give us boxes of fruit (which he did) if we would stop damaging the trees when we stole the fruit. I remember that the Government gave us free milk. We had cups and mugs. It was ladled out of a milk churn. It was great to be picked for the ladling job, as you could give yourself extra if there was any left over.

We had 'houses', where four groups were given names such as 'Flinders', 'Sturt', etc. in Grades 5-8. One of the house jobs, apart from tidying up the school yard, was to clean and set the fire places in each of the school rooms and the Headmaster's office in the winter.

In the later years, I had a very busy schedule. At 11 years of age, I took on the job of cleaning and sweeping out the school. This I did immediately after school had finished, or after I had finished the morning paper round, or during it. Later on, I delivered the afternoon paper rounds as well.

My mother and I went back to the school at the weekend, usually on Sundays, and polished the Headmaster's office, and generally spruced things up. The money I earned helped my mother, who was a widow. I kept enough so I could go to the Picture Theatre in Mentone, and buy sweets. I often went to there two or three times a week.

I remember when I was very young coming to School and finding a group of parents arguing with one another because their children had been in a fight the day before. It was the Perrys and the Kellys. My recollection of Miss Holland, the Junior Grades Teacher 1-4 is not always kind. Her favourite method of imparting justice, or telling you what a silly child you were, was either to rap you on the knuckles with a ruler, sometimes your legs. I do remember occasions when she would grab me by the ear, and drag me up in front of the class because I couldn't work out the right positioning of WHO, WHOM, and WHOSE in various sentences. Grammar was not my best subject. My last Headmaster was Mr Boyd, who I liked. He had an old car. Perhaps it wasn't too old for that period. It had a canvas top. He often drove 5 or 6 of us to various outings.

We used to have a school bank. This was collected for on Fridays, and one of us boys in Grade 7 and 8 would take it on our bicycle to the Cheltenham State Savings Bank, and deposit the money, usually pennies, threepences and sixpences. One day I got the job. On the way along Weatherall Road, my front wheel left the bike when I tried to skip over a hole in the old road, because I hadn't tightened the front wheel nuts whilst fixing the wheel because the bell rang at play time. I skidded along the rough road on my face and hands. The money went everywhere. Somebody picked me and the money up, and took me into a house nearby. I was a bit dazed, and had gravel rash all over my hands and face, but I was able to deliver the mixed up money to the bank and return to school where everyone got a shock at my dishevelled and bloody appearance. The Headmaster sent me home to recuperate. I didn't get the job again for a long while.

Another time, I found a swagman's hut in the bush nearby. I brought some girls and boys back after school to see it. Being 'brave', I opened the tea tree door to show them the inside. As I walked in, I noticed a pair of boots sticking out from under the door. I nearly knocked everyone over in my haste to get out of there. Everyone went screaming off into the bush. Later on we regrouped and went to get Mr Pittock, the poultry farmer near the school. He returned with us, carrying a gun, as the swagman had bee frames of honey in the hut, and Mr Pittock also had bee hives.

I was living in Oak Street at this time, and we had gypsies camping in the bush at the back of us once. They had cars, and caravans to live in - all car-towed caravans, not horse-drawn caravans - as they were modern gypsies.