

Rae Fortier

Memories of my school days at Canterbury Central Domestic Science School.

In 1930 my parents, two young sisters and I moved to Canterbury. It was during the world wide Depression and thousands of men were out of work (my father was one of them). In 1930 and 1931 I was in 5th and 6th classes at Canterbury Girls Primary School. The government of the day issued coupons to families, which they could exchange at shops for food. Most families in those days were 'on the dole' as it was called. There was also a relief scheme to provide work for men.

A new school was being built in Church Street, next to the Primary School during this time. Several houses had to be demolished. At the end of 6th class, we sat for an exam called QC (qualifying certificate), which entitled us to go into classes at what were called "Superior Public Schools'. Most children left school at 14 years, which was the official leaving age at that time, so these classes filled that space.

In 1932 the new school opened for pupils and I was in this group, starting in 1st year. The new school was called Canterbury Central Domestic Science School (now Canterbury Girls High School) and all 1st year students had to take the domestic course. As girls were coming from the surrounding suburbs, there were quite a few in the 1st year classes.

To make a back entrance from Minter Street, a house was demolished. Beside the fence adjoining the primary school was a cottage which housed Mr McLeod, the new school caretaker. There were houses all along Minter Street, round into Princess Street and again into Church Street up to the new school.

The domestic course classes were for cooking, laundry, sewing and drafting. Small rooms were furnished as a kitchen, bedroom, dining room and bathroom for housekeeping. I think the first article I made for sewing was a pair of bloomers (undies with long legs nearly to the knees, with elastic around the bottoms). It was all hand sewing in those days – no sewing machines at school. It was the era of treadle sewing machines, when we had to put our foot on a pedal, and pedal like mad to make the needle go up and down.

Besides the domestic subjects we also had general subjects – English (composition and dictation), Arithmetic, Algebra, History, Geography, Physiology and Hygiene.

I was in 1A and my class teacher was Miss Evans. We had our own classroom and could leave books under our desks – only taking home those needed for homework. One girl was appointed monitor, and her job was to keep the inkwells filled, as we used pen and ink in those days. We made 'pen wipers' which were several layers of material scraps from home (about 6 inches long and joined together in the centre which folded over to look like a little book). We wiped our pen nibs on them to preserve them and stop them rusting.

All 1st year students had to take Cooking and Home Management, but in the second year could continue with the Domestic course or take the Commercial course, which included Bookkeeping, Shorthand and Typing. This is the course I took.

The only lessons we had to go to other rooms for were the domestic courses and shorthand and typing. For typing we had to make a cover (bib) usually of black sateen or another material that couldn't be seen through. It had two loops, one to go around the typewriter and the other around our necks, so we couldn't see the typewriter keys whilst we were typing.

On Monday mornings all classes assembled in the playground behind the Assembly Hall and Miss Summerly would address us from the middle window at the back of the stage area

(above the tuckshop). I can remember reciting the School Pledge, "I honour my God, I serve my King, I salute my Flag". The King of England at the time was George V. A basketball court was marked out in this area.

Some of the teachers I remember were:

Miss Summerly (Head Mistress)	Miss Dunlop (Deputy Head)
Miss Holmes (Shorthand and Typing)	Miss Bray (History)
Miss Huey (Physiology and Hygiene)	Miss Field (Business Principles)
Miss McIlwraith (Art)	Miss Ellis (composed school song)
Mrs Britton (Sewing)	Miss Parkinson (my 3rd teacher)

I can remember embroidering doilies for the Fete (called a Bazaar in those days). In junction with this some of the older girls made money by showing Shadow Plays. These were performed in a store room in the Assembly Hall roof, which has a door in the centre of the upstairs corridor. The performers were behind a sheet with a bright light behind them, so that all that the entire audience saw were shadows. I well remember the 'doctor' operating on a patient, first disembowelling her (a string of sausages) and then proceeding to remove everything in sight.

The girls who had been attending Superior Public Schools joined the new school as 2nd, 3rd and 4th year students. This was the first year that the 4th year started, and these girls would become 5th year students the following year.

There were four hat rooms at school, one at each end of the main corridor near the stairs on both floors. They were smallish rooms with an open doorway, with 2 or 3 rows of wooden pegs running around the walls. The last time that I visited the school, I noticed that these four rooms now have doors on them.

I have no school photos. As this time was during the Depression, perhaps there were none taken?

At the end of the year I was awarded a prize for gaining '3rd place in 2nd year – 1933' signed by the Head Mistress (Miss Summerly). My prize was a book entitled "The Poems of Tennyson" and whilst there were other things I would rather read than poetry, I did read it to refresh my memory. "The Lady of Shallot" is the only poem I can remember any lines from.

At the end of 3rd year we sat for the Intermediate Certificate. I passed with A's in Shorthand (theory), Business Principles and Art (although an A for art amazes me, my interest in Art is on par with poetry).

In 1933 and 1934 I sat for two Shorthand exams with the "incorporated Phonographic Society", which I passed – one with distinction.

My only memories of going to sport are very vague – except for swimming. We would walk down Church Street and catch the tram in Canterbury Road, travel through Hurlstone Park, Dulwich Hill, Lewisham, Petersham and Leichhardt and up Norton Street to Leichhardt Park where we all alighted. After walking through the park we came to the Leichhardt Baths in Iron Cove (off Parramatta River). The baths covered a fairly large area enclosed by wooden piles driven down into the water and covered all around with a net to keep sharks and other fish out. There were small cubicles to undress in and leave our school cases.

Across the centre of the baths was a pontoon which we all would climb on and jump off. It was attached on both sides to the wooden piles, so it could rise and fall with the tide. If we ever arrived when the tide was out, we had to squelch through mud to get to the water. It was during the Depression, and the priority of building baths in the suburbs was not high. Canterbury Baths were built in about 1956. My sister who is eight years younger than me can remember going further on to Balmain Baths (which was at the end of the tram line). She started school the year after I left.

Our annual sports days were held at Canterbury Race Course and spectators sat in the grandstand whilst competitors performed on the race track in front.

My first recollection of seeing an aeroplane was when a little bi-plane flew over the school, we were allowed to all crowd to the windows and watch it, its propeller whirring around at the front.

I left school in 1934, at the ages of 14 and 6 months. Every child's aim was to get a job so they could contribute to the family income. I didn't get a job until mid-1935, when I started at Canterbury District Memorial Hospital, my first pay was 14/6 (fourteen shillings and sixpence) a week - \$1.45 in today's money. I started on the telephone switch board – with its many cords and plugs (with lots of holes to plug the cords into) – an appliance I had never seen before. We didn't even have a telephone at home so I was not used to talking into a mouth piece. I survived, and when I left in 1943 I had been promoted to the role of Senior Clerk.

I also have a vague recollection of attending night school at Ultimo Tech. In my early teens (and unescorted) I would take the train to Central, walk through the very long Devonshire Street tunnel, cross Railway Square to Marcus Clarks Emporium (one of Sydney's large stores), then left past the Glaciarium (the very popular ice skating rink which was down a very long passage as it was behind the shops), then turned right down Harris Street where the Tech was. Then I have to travel back home again after the lesson. I don't remember anything about the lessons – only getting there and back home again. The venue is now part of Sydney University.

I was at a meeting of Canterbury Hospital Younger Set in 1938 when the current Prime Minister (Robert Menzies) announced over the wireless radio that England had declared war on Germany and as Australia was a member of the British Commonwealth, we were at war too. There were plenty of restrictions during the war – regarding what we could land could not do. Coupons were in place again. We had them for clothing, meat, tea, sugar, butter and petrol. Petrol rationing continued for a year after the war ended. An extra ration was allotted pregnant women and children's rations were smaller than adults.

We were all issued with identity cards and had to carry them with us at all times. Street lights were blacked out and Railway Stations had the names of the suburbs removed, just in case the Japanese invaded us.

I married in 1942 and had two children. My daughter Ruth also attended Canterbury Girls High School (about the time that the name changed).

I joined the Cantabrians Girls Ex-Students Association when it started in about 1983, and have enjoyed the meetings ever since. I celebrated my 90th birthday in 2010, and in 2012 it will be 80 years since Canterbury Central Domestic Science School opened for its first intake of pupils.