

## **My School Life at Canterbury Girls High 1923 – 1924**

By Beatrice Grace Bridgland

My name was Beatrice Grace Dilley, but all my life I have been known as Trixie but my surname is now Bridgland, my late husband's surname.

I was born in England 20th January 1910 and came to Australia with my father, mother and brother John in 1912; we had no relations at all in Australia. I was born in the Hertfordshire Police Station as my father was the Police Sergeant in charge. I do not remember it as I was only one year old and my brother three years old when we left.

Although most girls passed their Qualifying Certificate in 6A class at Campsie Primary School in 1922, half of us had to repeat another year, only because there was not room enough at Canterbury Girls Home Science for us all. They had to take pupils from as far away as Revesby to Burwood being no other secondary school in between. The next nearest was Kogarah High School. I was one of the girls to miss out, and not happy about it, so we had to wait till 1923 to start our High School learning.

### **Our Uniform**

Canterbury was an all girls school; our uniform was a navy blue serge tunic with 3 box pleats back and front. Our school colours were blue and gold, which went for hair ribbons too. We had a white blouse with short sleeves for summer and long sleeves for winter and a blue and gold tie for winter, navy blue pullover and/or a navy blazer, black shoes and socks of stockings.

Panama hat for summer. Blue felt hat for winter.

We used a 16 inch globate suitcase, which was heavy before we started to put books into it. Our sewing we carried in a drawstring rag bag.

Another rag bag was used to carry our neck to knee swimming costume on swimming days.

I travelled by steam train back and forth each day from Campsie to Canterbury. The morning train left at a quarter to nine each day and if we missed it we had to wait for 1 hour for the next one at quarter to ten which made us very late for school and we had to miss play time. It happened too many of use, especially in winter, and we would arrive at school cold and wet. I cannot remember having a plastic raincoat but perhaps an old umbrella!

We were issued with a free train pass and if we lost it! Well we had to go to the Station Master at Campsie, who also had a daughter at our school and he was very kind to us if this happened.

The girl's name was Grace Chamberlain.

The course then was 1 year Home Science, second and third year mostly Commercial. The first years were 7A, 7B and 7C. We did Cooking, Needlework, Geography, we dropped these three subjects after 7th year but we carried on with Botany, Art, Hygiene, Maths, Mental Arithmetic, Ancient and Modern History, into 8th class A, B and C.

Our Headmistress was Miss McMenemy who also taught singing.

7A – Miss Rogers, Maths, English, History (Ancient and Modern) and Geography

7B – Miss Moody, I was in her class. She taught the same. Miss Hederman also taught the same subjects.

Physical Culture – Miss Kelly 2 years

Hygiene – Miss Willard 1 year

Cooking – Miss Whiting 1 year

Needlework – Mrs Green 1 year

Botany – Miss White 1 year

Art – Miss Daley 7th, 8th and 9th class in class room.

Hygiene, Cooking, Needlework were all taught in the old school house.

Botany in class room or garden.

Miss Willard taught us a lot during her lesson, quite interesting really, as we had to go to the spare room in the old cottage, where there was a bed and we had to learn how to make it. I still remember, that is why I still know the big hem of the sheet goes to the top to turn over, how to tuck in, well I could have wanted to be a nurse. I did want to then, we learnt to bandage knees, arms and lots of useful things and we enjoyed it.

We also had to learn to draw house ventilation, cavity walls, drainage systems, one would have thought we were young men going into the building or plumbing trade but this was Hygiene class and we liked it.

Miss Whiting's cooking class was also in the old cottage. We wore a white calico square neck dress and a cap like a nurse and white apron. I had to pass in our weekly write up and she was very severe with marks. If you failed to bring dish cloth, tea towel you lost more marks, these marks were carried over to our leaving at end of 2 years. We had to scrub the table tops which were white wood with monkey soap and Miss Whiting would run her hand over for grit not washed off properly. We were always in "trouble", we worked in pairs, my mate was Doreen Bond. I wonder if she is still alive and is 81 years old the same as I am now, it is 67 years ago, Oh Dear! I sat beside Doreen in 6A class at Campsie Primary School as well and we were good friends.

School must have been pretty good at Canterbury because Doreen learned Elocution and if it was a wet day and we couldn't go to sport, the teacher would ask Doreen to recite a few of her special poems, other than that we were allowed to read an interesting book or knit.

On the wall of the "Needlework" room was a motto:

"A STITCH IN TIME SAVES NINE", in big print.

On the Cookery class wall was:

"PROCRASTINATION IS THE THIEF OF TIME", how true, I have found these two quotations very real during my life time.

The only subject we did not learn about was sex instruction, and it was not talked about in the playground either.

STILL 1st Year 7B

**Physical Culture**

Miss Kelly was very young, but mature. She had an old gramophone and records which she wound up for music for us to do our exercises on the front playground. We wore a white blouse and black bloomers with knee cuffs and white sand shoes. All the passersby would stand and watch us; we also did the maypole dance.

### **Needlework**

Mrs Green took needlework in the old school house room. We were taught how to draft our own patterns, it was not easy but we all eventually managed and made a pair of calico knickers and camisole. We made them for our mothers of course, not ourselves. We had a treadle sewing machine which was very helpful for long seams; hems were done by hand, so hard too we thought. We also had to learn to knit properly it was easy until we had to turn the heel of a pair of men's socks but most of us managed before the end of the year.

Mrs Green was not young, but a very capable teacher, her class was big and if you talked to your mate you were brought down the front, this happened to me quite often.

### **Swimming**

Miss Hederman was also a class teacher, but not mine.

It was the most exciting day of the week, we all went by tram "Special" of course, to Leichhardt baths.

Miss Hederman was our sports teacher winter and summer, winter was vigaro in the playground.

Swimming at high tide one week was good but the following week was low tide. We had an oil ring and mud up to our chins, which a cold shower at the baths failed to remove.

It cost 2 pence each way in the tram, 1 penny into the baths which left us 1 penny to spend as we came through the turnstile and lolly shop to come home again in the tram. It bought a brandy snap, 2 aniseed balls or a lolly pop. We enjoyed the afternoon once a week with Miss Hederman because she was a good "sport", we wore our neck to knee wool costume and carried it in a rag bag with a draw-string, as well we had to carry our 16 inch Globite suitcase with our text books etc. which was quite heavy. Miss Kelly, our Physical Culture teacher also went with us and taught us how to swim.

### **Sports Afternoon**

I was only 4'10" tall and could not learn basketball so played vigaro and tennis. Miss Hederman was a good all-round sports teacher but I was glad I was not in her 7C class as her room was next to our and she banged the desk with a ruler but she had good results as her class got better results at end of year than we did.

### **Art**

Miss Daly was a very special teacher if you could do Arts. I was not very "artistic" but did manage to china paint a cup, saucer and plate which had to be English china and cost my mother too much because English china in those days was expensive. I kept it for a year. Most of Arts class I spent in Miss McMenemy's office, not for what I did wrong, but what "I couldn't do" without proper arts material, my mother did have eight children in ten and a half years. I was the eldest of five girls with two younger brothers and my elder brother who is 1 ½ years older than me. He was at Ashfield High School and it was clear to me it was more important for him to have his education because he was a boy, girls were not so important in my school days. But not so now, thank goodness, as my own two sons and my

grandchildren have it all so easy, all have passed HSC or Intermediate and Leaving Certificates.

### **Singing**

Miss McMenamy's class – as I spent so much time in her office on Arts day she asked me did I like singing. Sure I said! I meant it too, so I joined her singing and music class, learned DO, RAY, ME, SO Do. Strange after leaving school I learnt singing at my own expense, 1 shilling a lesson and also joined a four string orchestra playing a mandolin, buying it myself and later played on stage. I was then 16 years old and did well at it.

### **Botany**

Miss White – we did work in class room and then off to our garden at the back of the lunch shed, we even had a very lovely wild flower garden. Miss White's niece was one of my class friends, her name was Elvie White, we worked together in the garden digging out weeds and watering with a large watering can putting more water and mud on ourselves, but we did learn how to grow seeds and thought nature study was clever but did not think it was important to a girl's class.

But since leaving school, being married, I always was interested in our home and garden and pot plants. Now all I have is pot plants because I am in an upstairs unit.

### **Geography**

This was held in our own class room and Miss Moody was the class teacher. A very good teacher because she had more than one subject to teach, mainly Maths, English, History, both Ancient and Modern and Geography, which was really interesting. We had a map of the whole world on a stand and the printing was so good it could be seen if you sat in the back seats. I was always in the front seat (mainly I think I talked in class) but with a big ruler or stick we had to follow the trade routes around the world and also things which each country produced. Where our exports went to and imports came from, I used to get carried away with the trade winds, wishing one day I may sail around them and see them for myself. I think the main route in those days would have been via the Suez Canal and India and tea was very interesting. Little did I know then the day would come when I did travel right around the world, but strange because by then the Suez Canal was closed.

English and History I liked too, learning of Kings and countries but more special was Ancient History with its pre-historic works. They all seem so fascinating yet on the other hand, it was hard to believe it all happened on this big map of the world we would gaze at.

Miss Moody gave us a good sound knowledge of maths and £SD in other words it was NOT decimal currency then but pound notes and coins all changed now, and we never looked back.

### **Scripture Class**

This was held at St Pauls Church opposite. This was for all protestant girls and boys from both schools.

Each Friday morning we assembled and marched across the road to the church where the boys sat on one side of the aisle, the girls sat the other side. We had to go through a whole morning service, singing hymns and prayers etc., and not talk or fiddle.

Rev Hefferman was then quite an elderly minister, or maybe we thought he was, because he could not tolerate talking or “fiddling” with hands, shuffling feet etc. during the service and sermon from the pulpit.

The boys, if they had no pennies for the collection plate, would use metal buttons taken from their trousers.

I can't remember the girls doing anything bad, only giggle, but we felt sorry for the boys because their Headmaster had them punished in some way we guessed after school, like clean up the playground and wash the ink wells.

Strange, after losing my first husband in 1940 I decided to re-marry in St Pauls where I went to school services on a Friday. The Minister who should have performed this marriage was then overseas during the war but is now married himself and lives in the same village as I do. His name is Rev Canon Rook, he often takes the service here in our village as he is now retired and there is a roster system.

### **Year 8 – 1924**

Class teacher – Miss Cormick. Maths, Business Principals and English. Also teach Miss Holmes for Typing, Shorthand and Business Principals.

Miss Cormick would have been the best Maths teacher ever, particularly mental arithmetic. Her star pupil was a friend of mine, still is, as she lives here in the Retirement Village and is just a few months older than me. Her name was Florence Earl and she had her hand up before Miss Cormick really finished the question.

It made the rest of the class somewhat lazy because we could never seem to win. It is strange that now I am 81 years old and I am really very good at mental arithmetic, then again we did not have computers to do it for us.

Miss Holmes- Typing and Shorthand. Our typewriters were few and very old and some girls, although they could learn shorthand, were lucky to be able to get to use a typewriter, just not enough to around a large class of girls. A shame really because all were very interested in and wanting to learn.

Here I was in 8A and I was 14 years of age but I knew it was not to last, school leaving age was 14 years of age then. When I returned home from school towards the end of year 8A class, my mother told me my school days were over and I must leave. My mother was not well and it was costing her too much to keep me at school so I did not finish my 2 year course because my next sister was to start the next year at Ashfield High School. Also my elder brother had to stay on at Ashfield High School to gain his Intermediate Certificate and it was more important for him as he wanted to do a trades course. Sometimes I wished I were a boy.

Also I had six more brothers and sisters to be educated, the youngest was 5 years old. No amount of crying could convince my mother or father that I did NOT want to leave school. I felt cheated of my education but had to accept it and leaving all my friends, from two schools really because I did Kindergarten and Primary at Campsie Public School too.

This was 1924, which is 67 years ago but I remember it as if it was yesterday so it must have been a very happy school life yet most of us would have been through world war one, 1914-1918.

Many of the girls would have lost their fathers and we all suffered lack of food essentials, rations of butter, sugar, meat, jam and clothing. I was five years old when I started school at

Campsie Infants so went through all war years. We of our age all did, it was very hard for all families, but somehow we all managed because in Primary School we did so much to raise money to buy wool for Red Cross to knit for soldiers at the war. I was 7 years old, and in Primary School, in 1919 when the flu epidemic came and closed down all schools and turned them into hospitals replacing beds for desks and yet in almost 10 years I learnt quite a lot at school.

## **1924**

I was 14 years of age when I left Canterbury High School. I was allowed to work in a small place near home making baby wear at 12 shillings a week. I was allowed two shillings and six pence for myself, this I paid for mandolin lessons and saved up and bought a mandolin with my own money and then joined a 4 string instrument orchestra and played on stage for many years. Then I followed Miss McMenemy's singing class and learnt singing and sang on stage too. I loved music but paid for it all myself.

I also joined the robed Choir at St John's Church, Campsie which had men, girls and boys.

I was confirmed there and then started to teach Sunday School to a class of 10 girls of about 8 years of age until I got older and then was teaching 12 year olds. I managed them well. Maybe if I could have stayed at High School I could have become a teacher in Primary Schools, lots of my friends did.

When I was 16 years old my parents bought a large brick home at Lakemba. We, her eight children, all went with them and were so proud of our new house, my parents paid the last instalment on it and owned it when the last of their 8 children were married and they moved to a smaller one (new) at The Entrance. My father had retired and I guess my mother was glad to retire! – from "housework" and cutting school lunches.

I was married from St John's Campsie, the first marriage, to my girlfriend's brother, her name was Hazel Bushnell but that was in 1938.

Then World War II came and one of my brothers went to Singapore and then to Changi Prison Camp where he died one day before peace was declared.

My father lived to be 83 years old, my mother to 97. There were wonderful parents, the family of 6 of their children are now scattered around NSW and all have good lives, their own homes, children and grandchildren. I have a little more than them, I have 4 great grandchildren. My two sons, one from both of my husbands, both husbands died suddenly. Three generations making me the fourth. Both sons and their wives are successful business men and women.

My grandchildren, 3 are married, all work. Another grandson attends Newcastle University and his sister is in her 4th year in the Nave, HMAS Kuttabul. I was at her passing out parade 2 years ago.

Other grandchildren are in bank, law and accountancy and all are very happy. I am proud of them all and I keep up with all their school affairs, birthday etc. wedding, scout rallies, debutante balls and christenings.

## **Back to Geography with Miss Moody**

Because after my second husband died when he had only retired less than a year, he had a heart attack and died in a train on the way from The Entrance where we had had two days with my mother, I then moved to a Retirement Village.

Because I loved learning of Trade Routes, in 1971, when I was 61 years old, 2 other ladies from the Village and I decided we would take a trip to England. I had an 82 year old Aunt in Southampton and my friends wanted to visit Scotland and France. We were away seven months, going via the Panama Canal and returning via Italy and South Africa. I also had Australian friends who had gone to Holland to live so I flew alone from Heathrow to Amsterdam. Then all three of us jet up and had our passage back to Australia. Although England was my birthplace I really was pleased to see Australia again and be back with my family.

I feel that my class with Miss Cormick had not been wasted either as I learnt all about maths and money, the different currency was a bit hard but we managed it very well. I can still do mental arithmetic too. I am now doing voluntary work here in the Village, working in our Opportunity Shop twice a month. I like doing it and its good for the mind and "maths". I came to the Village when my second husband died, we had a new home, our two boys were married and we were very happy at Bundeena which I loved, but I tried it out on my own for a year but I was too lonely.

My whole life has been a challenge, it has happened to so many of us here at the Village, some residents are 90 years and over and still "with it", most like me are about 80 to 86 years.

I would like to say how wonderful it is now to be a member of my "dear Old Girls School".

If there had only been help for scholars at the school when I needed it most, like our committee are doing now, maybe I could have finished my years at Canterbury and gained my Intermediate.

I know I was asked to speak today on my school life at Canterbury Girls High. I spent only really nearly 2 years but I think of it as yesterday with gratitude of being able to be a scholar. I really did learn much in those 2 years, if it only taught me to "grow up" and "make good" in the world, which I'm sure I have done or not for want of trying, I started at the bottom of the ladder.

I was 50 years old when I learnt to drive a car I bought by working as a Saleswoman 2 days per week. My husband paid for driving lessons, his eye sight would not pass for a license, mine did. I lost confidence at 60 years old and gave it up, I have plenty of family to drive me now and I use the bus.

I feel happy enough to think my memory of schools days are still with me and I treasure all those memories.