

**Margaret Harries (nee
Fraser)**

Mid to late 1930's

Before I went to school, my father and Aunt went to Newcastle East Public School. My Father's name was Allan Livingstone Fraser, and his sister was Kezia Webb Fraser, and I understand my Father's Aunt, (whom I believe was Ms Kate Fraser) was actually a teacher at the school.

Living at 26 Parnell Place, Newcastle East with my family, we all attended Newcastle East Public School.

The family members starting from oldest to youngest were; Jean, Allan, Ronald, Noel, myself and Keith. We lived close, so we walked to school.

As best as I can work out, I started at the school in 1932 or 1933 and was there for 6 or 7 years from Kindergarten until starting high school.

Amongst the friends who went to school with me in that period were Eileen Sidney, Marie Stewart, Norma Atkins, Audrey Edge and Norma Heston. I remain good friends and in contact with Eileen Sidney right to the present day. I still see, from time to time, Audrey Graham (nee Edge), and Norma Bennett (nee Heston).

I can recall two headmasters from my days of school - they were Mr Bradley and Mr Hartnett. My recollection of Mr Hartnett was he was a gentle, softly spoken man.

By way of teachers, I can recall: Ms Carroll who not only taught at the school, but also taught at the Royal Newcastle Hospital; Ms Fitness; Mr Caldwell; and Ms Freeman.

My only and most vivid memory of one of those teachers was her pre-occupation at assembly towards regimenting the children into a straight line - that was Ms Fitness.

Like many students, the best thing I recall about Newcastle East Public School was the day I left and did not have to go back!

Of course, there are often things that went on, the teachers were unaware of, and no doubt it was no different to the scallywag things of today when the teachers walk out the door. A couple of things come to mind, but in the interests of discretion, not wishing to embarrass any former classmates, those things are best left a secret.

The special events in the school year while I was a student included Anzac Day, Empire Day and of course, the Christmas season. Leading up to such events in the weeks beforehand, we would be drilled and drilled as to the

songs we had to sing to celebrate.

And of course, who can forget the special events around Coronation Day - not only did we practice singing but there was emphasis on dances and celebrations - I vividly recall practising out on the sports field, the May Pole dance.

At lunchtime, the girls played hopscotch, skipping and handball. The boys got involved in rough play and of course, young ladies did not participate in those days. Not only that, we were segregated - the boys played with the boys and the girls played with the girls.

By way of educational activity within the school, there was much emphasis on reading, writing, arithmetic (the three R's) and also we did history, composition, and the things we would need for skills later in life: the girls did sewing, the boys did woodwork.

Rules in classes were much regulated in

those days; to ask a question you raised your hand and waited to be acknowledged; if spoken to by the teacher and asked to respond to a question, you had to stand; once allocated a desk in the room, that was where you stayed, you had no choice as to where you sat. Errant boys were caned in front of the class - the willow cane coming down heavily on the palm of the hand - the whole class experienced the actual punishment. The headmaster was obviously able to swing the cane heavier because whenever the boys were really naughty, they were sent to the headmaster and received additional canings.

Whilst school uniform was not compulsory in those days, particularly as it was the depression era, there was a school uniform, and for the girls it was a navy blue pleated tunic with a white blouse - shoes and socks were also worn.

At the school we played a variety of

sports. Given our close proximity to Newcastle Beach, swimming was on the agenda and that was at the Newcastle Ocean Baths. The baths master was Mr Hoquard - my vivid memory is, he was often a cranky man. I do recall in a swimming carnival while at Newcastle East Public School, I won a trophy in a swimming event for a girl's championship.

Other sports included tunnell ball, and other team games involving balls. Of course, school athletic carnivals revolved around races in age groups - the carnivals were held in the grounds of what was then the Watt Street Mental Home and now known as the James Fletcher Hospital.

I suppose most people have some memories, not so pleasant of school. Mine was, I despised sewing lessons and I often found the teachers cranky - perhaps they were frustrated at teaching me, I'm not really sure about that.

Leisure activities in those days were the simple things: in Parnell Place there was and still is, a park in the middle of the roadway and we played there often. Alternately we played with our friends in the backyard. Those who know the area, would realise the yards are tiny, being at the rear of terraced homes, and grass was not around, but

rather, the yards were brick paved. Playing in the park and playing on the front area of Fort Scratchley, we used to climb on the coal monument and also on the relics of armaments at the front of the fort. Zaara Street Power Station was still operational in those days, as was the Fort.

Being at the top of town, over the hill was the Ocean Baths, but it cost threepence to enter and so, whilst we sometimes swam in the baths, more often we swam down on the beach - either at Nobby's or Newcastle, both being in close walking distance. I recall

going mullet fishing with my brothers - we used to use an oyster bottle with bread in the bottom and string tied around the bottle. We would submerge the bottle and wait for little mullet to swim in and then quickly yank out the bottle. There it was, a little mullet inside the bottle, all freshly caught. The fate of the baby mullet was as bait for the other fishermen in the family.

The highlight in that era was we would go out to Wangi to the family holiday home. It was quite a journey - first by train to Toronto, then a walk to the ferry wharf and then a ferry to Wangi.

In my family, we did not get pocket money, but we were given money for things we needed. Particularly, we were given money to spend in Mr Murray's shop which was located in Bolton Street next to Newcastle East Public School as it was then located. Like all kids, we predominantly spent our money on lollies. It was amazing what half a penny would buy! Every Saturday

afternoon we went to the pictures for the matinee session.

Responsibilities came much later in life those days, and I recall the girls of the family had responsibility to help Mum with the dusting and cleaning and looking after the younger members of the family.

A colourful character who comes to mind from my time in the Newcastle East community as a young child, was Black Harris, a West Indian. Not only was he a colourful character, but he was much feared. Right up until my father's death, he continually recalled stories of Black Harris and how he would shanghai young men onto sailing vessels by getting them drunk, knocking them out and then they would wake up, out to sea, pushed into being a member of the crew on the vessel. This really was part of the colourful scene in the Port of Newcastle at that period.

At school we had scripture lessons.

Being brought up in the Church of England religion, I attended scripture for that group, which was led by Mr Davies - he was a happy man who had the children regaling with laughter. So much fun indeed, that children from the Presbyterian's group eventually used to sneak from their group over to the Church of England group. This apparently caused some concern for the Minister of the Presbyterians, whom I recall was Mr McDittie - he was a Scotsman with a very broad accent.

Because of the shortage of children in his group, my older brother and I prevailed upon to leave the Church of England scripture lesson to join up with the Presbyterians, because with the surname Fraser, it was argued, we could only really be Presbyterians! I recall going to his scripture lessons and not understanding a word he said, so strong was his accent!

***Putting together this short little piece
has brought back many memories of
Newcastle East Public School, no doubt
many others will have similar memories.***