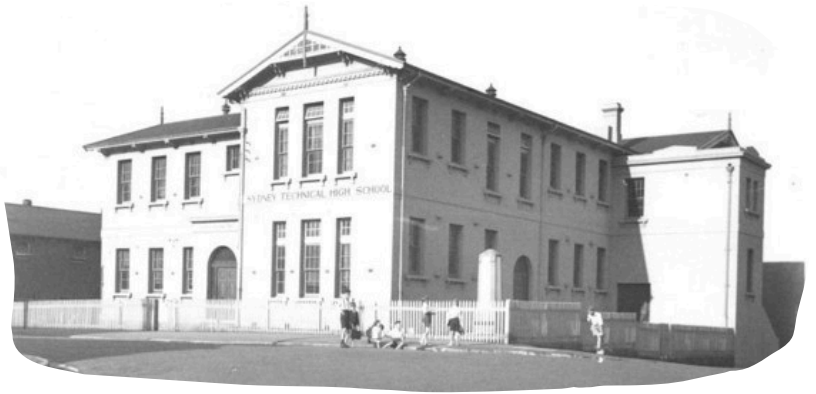


# PADDINGTON TO BEXLEY: 1953-1957

## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS BY KEN BOYES 1957



Today, I offer my personal reflections about life and times at Sydney Tech High between 1953-1957, that includes the period before and immediately after our move from Albion Street, Paddington to 'McConachie's Paddock' at Bexley in September 1956.

I was one of three first-year students from the Gladesville feeder region in 1953 and the sole traveller from there to Bexley in 1956-57. I experienced the entire period of Mr C E Lake's headmastership, and remain grateful for that, to this day. Travelling from Gladesville to Albion Street in 1953 was quite an adventure:

Leave home about 7:00am

- bus from Ryde via Victoria Road to Market Street City, or Central Station, usually delayed by Gladesville Bridge opening for the 60-miler collier delivering coal to Mortlake gasworks from Newcastle
- next, tram from St James or Central up Oxford St to Taylor Square
- then, along Oxford Street or Flinders Street to a convenient stop to walk up to school.

All this allowed social contact (initially anyway) with the girls from Sydney Girls High, Fort Street, Crown Street, and occasionally SCEGGS.



### Some comments about the trams.

First, the appalling OH&S conditions of conductors working the running boards in all weather conditions. Next, the social discrimination around the tram fleet. The Oxford Street trams were largely the open O-type. Anzac Parade had the 'toast rack' P and/or R-types. Watson's Bay had the padded leather seat RI's.

Finally, occasionally meeting Bea Miles in the front seats of the O-type trams between Central and Taylor Square. Bea was Sydney's original, notorious, eccentric, bohemian. Always dressed in sun-visor, overcoat and sandshoes, Bea never paid a tram or taxi fare. For a fee, she could quote any passage from Shakespeare!

Oxford Street was a Mecca for us Techies – for reasons vastly different to today. It was dominated by the old 'Disposal Stores' selling all sorts of war surplus services gear: clothes, tools, gadgets, camping and outdoor gear, knives and axes from all parts of the world – some of which are now banned from sale!

## AT LAST AT SCHOOL

Bloody hell! What DUMP! How on earth could this place have improved the conditions at Ultimo suffered by Messrs Turner and Williams and their students – both before and after 1911? At least then, the school was co-ed up to 1915!

I found an ancient stone building, a dreary black quadrangle and a brick, two storey science block known as 'Siberia', together with the four decrepit, flaking, creamy (possibly once white) weatherboard "temporary" classrooms that had come to the school in 1927 from the old infants school and were still in use in 1956. The woodwork/metalwork basement of the main building (labelled by one 5th year student as "Moore's Morgue") had been formally condemned years ago!

## STARTING AT SYDNEY TECH HIGH:

My Classes were: 1B, 2B, 3B, 4D, 5D TURNER House

## 1953 – My First Day

Room 1: Mr "Jazz" Aked – his first period also at Tech High. He was a great young teacher, a brilliant pianist and more than 6ft tall, who made both English and music enjoyable. He drove a Fiat 500 that at the 5th year farewell was managed to be parked between the school fence and front door!

Then: Professor Hartley – French – La plume de ma tante...etc

Next: Mr Cox – Maths I

The Tuckshop was a welcome delight – Thanks to Mrs Brooker. Your rissole roll with sauce at 11:00am, and/or a Sargent's pie for lunch still to this day, remain my memorable treats.

Thursdays – General Assembly in the quadrangle.

Mr Fin Cook was in charge – A direct, straight-talking Aussie ex-soldier from Pacific action in WWII. A no-nonsense presentation each week from the landing atop the steps from the quadrangle that covered:

- Sports reports (and other critical news)
- Rail passes, bus passes distributed with ruthless efficiency
- AND the QUADLIST! An hour of non-stop marching detention for sinners, and he also taught French.

## 1953 TO 1956 AT ALBION SREET

We lacked space and shared a neighborhood lacking many socially desirable features and attributes.

- PE was at Rushcutters' Bay pool in summer or at Moore Park kindergarten
- athletics, cricket and football at Moore Park
- swimming carnival at Bankstown
- athletics carnival at the SCG, highlighted by the "non-championship mile"

However those years yielded one unique benefit. After the end of year exams, we spent the mornings learning lifesaving at Redleaf Pool or Watsons Bay whilst teachers marked papers and prepared reports

The benefit?? Redleaf Pool was the favoured place then for aspiring young fashion models to be noticed, and was the only outdoor place in Sydney where females were permitted to wear two piece swimsuits!

Our teachers were masters at adapting whatever limited spaces and facilities could be found. Wherever possible, we learnt via practical demonstration, involving real empathy between master and student. Only in the years after school and university, did I appreciate that the frustration and challenges imposed by such an aged and overcrowded location fostered and developed such typical Tech characteristics of teamwork, determination, improvisation, harmony and tolerance.

Ultimo Street



Albion Street



One example: we calculated our personal "horsepower" by measuring our weight, then the time it took us to run up the height of the stairs from ground to top floor of the Science block, against gravity. Running on staircases?

Another example: demonstration of both the similarity and difference of elements of a group in the periodic table. We observed the rate of reaction of potassium and sodium with water. K – fizzed, Na – flamed, Li – could not be demonstrated without explosion.

And one last example: this time at the new school at Bexley. We were blessed there with Mr McLaren – a chemistry teacher par excellence who in WWII had served in the Army's Chemical Warfare Laboratory. Having survived a near disaster with phosgene gas in service, he was a laboratory safety fanatic. We had a large number of model aircraft enthusiasts using nitrobenzene to fuel the Frog 50 engines powering their masterpieces. To avoid us having accidents at home, he had us set up a nitrobenzene production unit at lunchtime in the upstairs science lab at school (NB this was preceding 'Quickfit' laboratory glassware). We heated with a Bunsen burner under a wire gauze square, a mix of concentrated nitric and sulphuric acids with benzene in a flask under reflux to form nitrobenzene. The product was then distilled and collected via a condenser packed in ice in the lab sink. Mutual trust between staff and students. Result: Our aircraft did fly.

At the school Centenary I recall the then Science Master noting to me that many of those activities and demonstrations were now forbidden as unsafe, although our masters ALWAYS stressed and demonstrated process safety!

## 1955 THE START OF A NEW ERA

Eisenhower was USA President – the Korean war was over – well, sort of. America was 'Master of the Universe' but then, cartoonist Al Capp's satirical comic strip 'Li'l Abner' introduced a parody of the American Bald Eagle symbol, namely the Slobbovian 'Bald Iggle' (Slobbovia was an imaginary east European country).

The 'Bald Iggle' was a mysterious little creature with the ability to make anyone who looked into its eyes tell nothing but the truth.

Canberra had 'Politiggles'. Foreign Minister Casey offered to donate one to the Opposition Leader Dr Evatt. Dr Evatt responded that if Casey was given one, Casey would shoot it.....typiggle?!

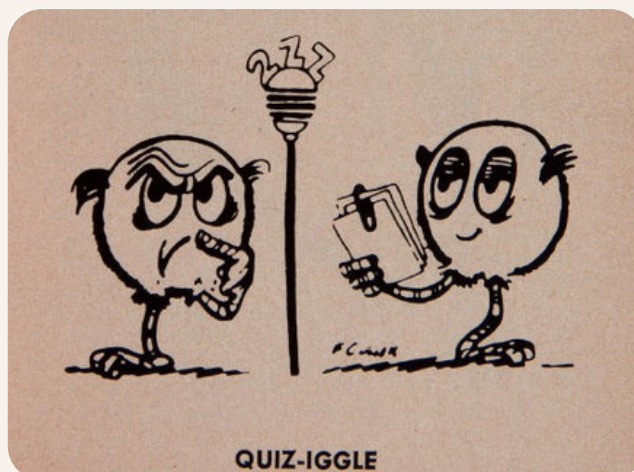
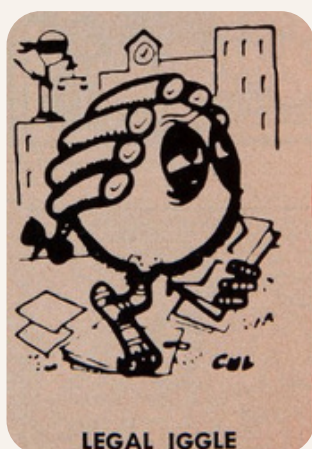
Newspapers ran competitions and were inundated with various illustrations of iggles.

Our 4th year boys constructed a Meccano 'Mechan-iggle' that ran around the quadrangle. The school noticeboard became covered with artistic examples – from both teachers and students.

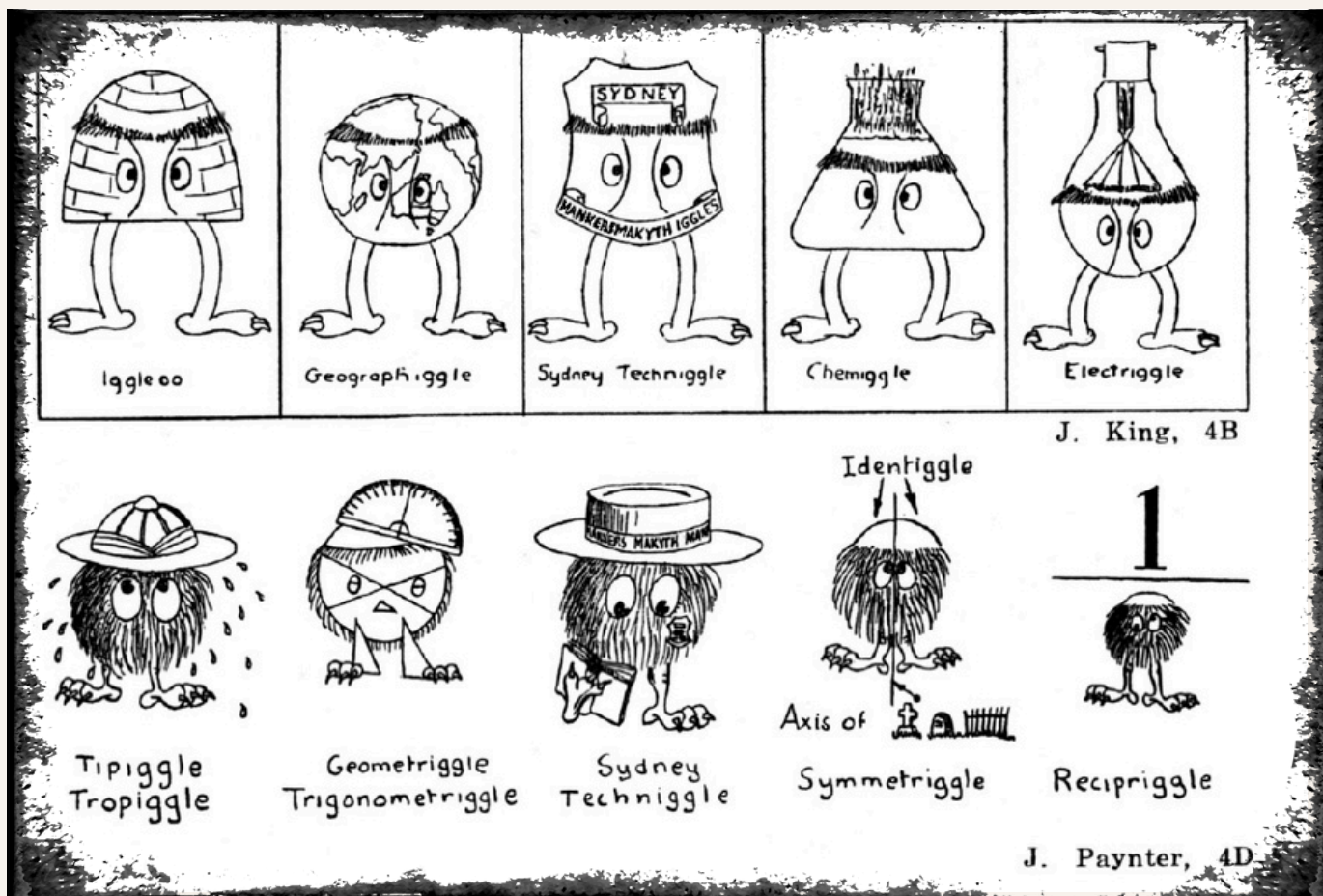
The 'rock 'n roll era' of Bill Haley and Elvis Presley caused a minor revolution ... an attempt to adopt an alternative school tie, in the form of alternative bright blue and shocking cerise bars. Available from Broadway Tailors, it was very popular for a few weeks until Mr Lake stepped in and banned it.

This year, the entire school walked down to Rushcutters Bay Oval to see our First XV thrash Bathurst High School 45-0. Unfortunately, another trek to McKay Oval saw us witness a 3-6 loss to Sydney High.

However, the end of 1955 was exciting: at long, long last, the Minister of Education, Mr Heffron laid the foundation stone of the new school in 'McConachie's Paddock' at Bexley on 26 November.







## STHS IGGLES

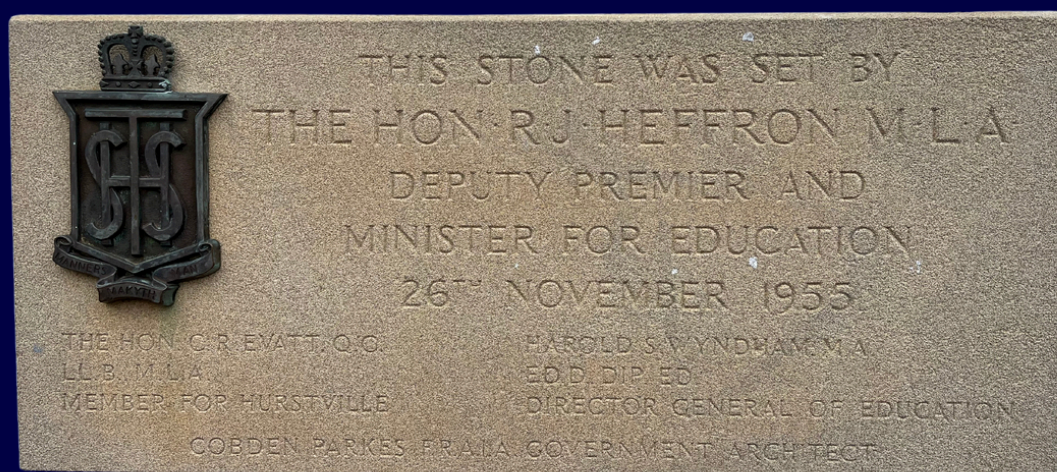
### 1956 STILL AT PADD0

After our Intermediate Certificate I accepted an offer from the Education Department to join a separate Manual Arts class, 4D, that offered an opportunity to maintain and develop skills that would prepare me to become a Manual Arts teacher and guaranteed appointment as teacher on completion of appropriate college training.

It involved one afternoon per week devoted to practical woodwork and metalwork, replacing periods for library and PE. Although I ultimately took up Industrial Chemistry rather than teaching, I regard this opportunity as a real highlight of my school learning. I treasure two of the tools I made and still use.

Incidentally, is hammer forging and case hardening of steel still practised at the school?

Mr Walters of 'Estapol' fame demonstrated his product and convinced me to use it on a two drawer student desk project that has served me and my children through school and university and is still used occasionally at home. One class member completed his 16ft plywood surfboard just months before Midget Farrelly introduced the balsawood board to the local surfing community. I never completed my steam engine, but I regard my cylinder and piston as a metalwork masterpiece.





## 1956 THE MOVE TO BEXLEY

For me, the move to Bexley, with all of its space and breathtaking state of the art facilities was so smooth that I frankly don't have a lot of outstanding incidents to recall. Just an overall appreciation of the facilities available, compared to the ancient, cramped and sometimes hazardous conditions at Paddington.

Consider: Foundation stone – November 1955.

New school complete and occupied – September 1956.

Cost: 350,000 pounds. (Our current Governments would love to produce housing at that rate!)

Some vestiges of Paddington were retained, including Mr Cook's weekly assemblies from the much larger landing above the quadrangle. Unfortunately, beloved "Black Mac" Roy McCurley, a survivor of the Gallipoli landing, a POW, and a feature of Paddington did not transfer with us. However, the Quadlist and QUAD were retained,

## 1957 AND THE LEAVING CERTIFICATE: The end is near.

Ryde to Bexley transport:

- 6:45am – Bus to the City, then train to Allawah or Carlton and walk to STHS

The reverse after last period.

Home on a peak hour bus, rarely before 5:00pm.

Bus from Rockdale station to STHS, if it was raining.

Lots of social interaction with schoolmates and other schools on the trains. Great reading time on the bus home.

At School: 5th year were assigned the Forest Road area with no shade. The Leaving Certificate was hanging over almost everyone. Recess and lunchtime were spent counting the rivets in the wings of DC6Bs heading to landing at Mascot.

The 5th Year Farewell was an unusually reserved celebration this year! Why? "Don't damage anything – the school hasn't yet been officially opened!" We limited ourselves to a pyjama party, all going to sleep on the landing behind Mr Cook at our final assembly. Various colours and styles, I recall that I wore a frilly floral shortie set that I borrowed from my 16 year old cousin.

Mr Lake forbade our intended parade in these outfits down to St George Girls High School. Our formal contact with the school ended at the farewell dinner where we demonstrated our genuine affection and respect for the skills, efforts and yes, tolerance of the teaching staff through what had been a tumultuous five years.

We honoured the example of Mr Lake, who was also leaving the school. He was calm, yet forceful – understanding, yet unbending when needed. I later recalled and tried to emulate those characteristics throughout my subsequent 46 years of refereeing men's, women's and school's soccer at all levels (and I never lost a game.) Our gift to him was a silver tobacco case with a roll your own device.

Unusual perhaps, but very apt and appreciated.

Thank You

*Ken Boyes '57.*

