WOLLONGONG SCHOOL AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

(Abridged from the reminiscences of Mr. C. S. Cutcher. A brief note on the author appeared in the May Bulletin)

Some memories of Headmaster, Assistants and Pupil Teachers whilst I was a pupil of the then Wollongong Superior Public School, as it was designated in those days (1897 to 1906):

At that time the pupil teachers were instructed by the Headmaster. They did not cease duty until 5 p.m. Memory recalls the respect we all had for each and all of these young men, fully dedicated, loyal citizens, good disciplinarians.

The three Headmasters during my time were A. O. Black, Robert Irwin, and William Vernon Brown. While naturally of very different personalities, all three were strict, excellent scholars and instructors. One common attribute was very noticeable, their appearance as gentlemen, dressed in the neat formal clothes of the time—I do not remember one of the three removing his coat in front of a class, even on the hottest day—and their actions as gentlemen. They taught the principles of loyal citizenship and acted accordingly. Knowing of those days, and acquainted with "moving with the times" and the catchword "current," I bemoan the fact that children must face slovenly-dressed male long-hairs, and be caught by "the right to strike" claimed by teachers who have apparently not yet realised the responsibility entrusted to them to mould good citizens who can spell and articulate when spoken to.

A. O. Black was a wonderful teacher. He was by way of being a chemical scientist, and conducted experiments (some of which could be seen by the lesser fry) on his cleared table. Upon his elevation to an inspectorate, he left much equipment and stores in the "wash-room" (no laid-on water). Some time later, the water having evaporated and exposed a lump of white phosphorus to the air, there was consternation and great activity as the smoke and fumes temporarily invaded the schoolroom; but to the pupils' regret there was no damage.

His daughter-in-law told me that A. O. Black was the first inspector to use motor transport (a motor bike) on his rounds.

He did not teach me, as I was very much a junior. I had commenced at a private school, and was therefore relegated to the lowest class and told to work up to promotion standard.

Robert Irwin followed—an excellent teacher but inclined to be very imperious. He made an example of his son, for whom we all felt great sympathy. Wielding the cane was a right of which he took advantage at any time; but he met discomfiture when he called out Ernest Funnell to receive punishment. Funnell was the most skilled ambidextrous person I have ever known. The sentence was six on the hand. Ernest had collected two, but while doing so had neared the desk and an inkwell. As the cane descended for the third time, like a flash the inkwell landed on the Head's immaculate boiled and ironed shirt-front. Funnell rushed to the back door and disappeared. The Head rushed for home, next door. Anticlimax: both were at
school next day as if nothing had happened—very disappointing, as we were all expecting more fireworks. Despite his rather intolerant faults in our estimation, in retrospect we would all admit to Irwin’s ability as a dedicated teacher.

The last Headmaster to teach me was William Vernon Brown, B.A. He and Mrs. Brown had perhaps the greatest influence educationally on a few of the higher class. Not only did we receive the benefit of the normal curriculum, but Mrs. Brown in her generosity made a room available in her home (they had no family) and gave us almost individual help. During my last days at school Will Brown helped me after hours on many occasions. I sincerely thank those two unselfish people.

John Layton, the 2 i/c, was a dour individual, a naturally stern disciplinarian, and a wonderful teacher. I chiefly remember his insistence on our learning, in addition to twelve times tables, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen and twenty-eight—a great brain exercise at the time, and to us seemingly very unnecessary; but a great help and a time-saver on many occasions during my life. I met John Layton once again, many years later; he was then Headmaster of the large Hamilton (Newcastle) School.

William Elston was our 2 i/c before John Layton. He was inclined to be unhurried, as shown by an incident which has stuck in my memory. His first assignment was a low class containing a lad who stuttered badly and was always excused from class reading. When W. Elston was informed of his affliction, the boy was told to rise and take his time to read a few lines. This treatment was repeated daily, with the pleasing result that, through this man’s patience and skill, the boy recovered to such an extent that we all forgot his previous sufferings. William Elston was not long with us, but I am sure that all would thank these two for their help.

I cannot now remember how the pupil-teachers and advanced pupil-teachers (all Wollongong boys) came and left us, but all left impressions of what and how they taught. Neatly-dressed, honourable, loyal citizens, all earned our respect in many ways. Among these young men I remember the names of John Treharne, Charles White, Walter Brown and Walter Edwards, but I know nothing of their progress after leaving Wollongong. Neil Grieve, I understand, became a Doctor of Medicine and a medical missionary. His brother Campbell Grieve gained a B.A. degree, and became a Presbyterian minister and, much later, State Moderator for New South Wales. Another, but much older, contemporary, the late Dr. Charles Jarman, became a musician, composer and organist of note. He was at one time organist of All Saints, Singleton, and gave well-remembered recitals in addition to his duties as church organist.