

Peter Blythe YHS 1954 wrote:

I remember – Newborough East and Yallourn. Reg Penkethman's article in the January 2013 newsletter, with many experiences similar to my own, suggested it was about time I added to the vast array of correspondence contributed to YOGA.

My father, John (Jack) Blythe, left England in March 1950 following a job offer from the SEC to work as a carpenter building houses at Newborough East. He came on the SS Ranchi as a £10 Pom and our family joined him later that year. Hilda, Jack's wife, and their four children Barbara, Peter, Eddie and David also came to Australia on the SS Ranchi, arriving in August 1950. All of the children were to have some years of study at Yallourn High School (YHS). From the SS Ranchi, we went straight into our new home at 21 Childers Street – opposite the first Newborough East Primary School buildings.

With the school across the road not yet open, Mum took me on the bus to Yallourn where I was enrolled in Primary School in Grade 4. The grade 4 class was then located in the guide hut down near the swimming pool. In this class I learned that if you just whispered out of turn, the boys got the cuts and the girls had detention after school. This term was not a very pleasant experience.



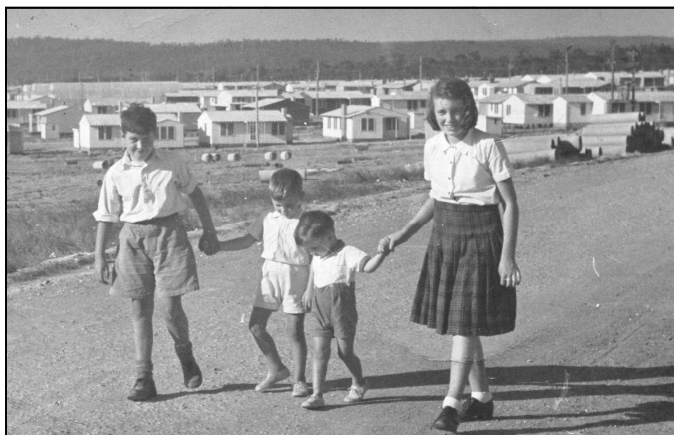
SS Ranchi - British Passenger Ocean Liner



Jack Blythe (2nd from right) and workmates building houses in Newborough for SEC employees -1950

In 1951, Newborough East Primary School must have opened in temporary accommodation (relocatables) although I have been unable to find the exact details. What I do know is that the permanent buildings must have been constructed while the children in grades 4-6 (I was still in grade 4!) were bussed to Morwell East Primary School where Mr Jackson was the headmaster. It was an enjoyable year out in the countryside although again there was a very liberal use of the strap!

In 1952, the new school buildings were opened, with Mr Mitchell as the headmaster, and now I was in grade 5 and Mr Brannigan was our first teacher.



Peter, Eddie, David & Barbara in Newborough - 1952

Grade 6 was the pinnacle of my leadership ambitions as I was the boy's School Captain. I doubt if I was ever in a real leadership role again while I was at school. Our grade 6 teacher was Mr Clark, who was not popular as I recall. He was, however, prepared to use school radio sessions and although not remembering any of the titles, I know we always enjoyed the ongoing serials. We also had a weekly visit from the local butcher who took us for religious instruction. He was a great story teller and I remember his telling of *The Bishop's Candlesticks* over a number of weeks.

The weekly grocery arrangement in Newborough East was a forerunner of today's online shopping, although more personal. The Purvis Store's representative from Moe would arrive with his order book and a list of 'specials' and Mum would place her order for the 'Purvis for Survis' van to deliver the next day.

With my younger brothers, I attended the St. Aidan's Sunday School at the local hall which, for us, seemed a long way to walk. Later, when the Methodist Church was established, much closer to home, we 'transferred' there and I was able to join the Boy's Brigade as well. My first holiday in Australia was at Ocean Grove in 1952, being a week with the Boy's Brigade.

In 1953, I went by semi trailer 'bus', along with most of the previous year's Grade 6 from Newborough East, to start secondary schooling at Moe High School. This was only the second year of the school's existence. (Now neither of the two high schools I attended exist.) I guess it was a good year, however there is nothing distinctive that I can remember about it. The main thing I do recall is that when our maths teacher, Mr Cockram, commenced the first class, he addressed the girls by their given names but the boys were expected to answer to their family names. I think teachers today generally try to relate more personally to all their students.

1954 was much more memorable. This year shaped the future of our family in a way that was quite different to what we would have expected. In March 1954, the Queen and Prince Phillip visited Yallourn and I was able to join with the Moe and Newborough Boy's Brigades for a 'fleeting' glimpse of the royal couple (blink!). It was, I am sure, a very significant day for the thousands who lined the route through the Yallourn township. On the following Saturday, we were to go on our first family holiday, an event I had been looking forward to. Our plans were changed at about 5pm on the Friday there was a knock on the door. A workmate of Dad's had called to inform Mum that Dad had been in an accident on his motor bike on the way home from work and had been taken to the Yallourn Hospital. (I recall my reaction was mainly disappointment because this clearly meant not going on our holiday.)

It was some fifteen months before Dad had fully recovered. He had, by then, learned to walk with an artificial limb following the eventual amputation of his right leg above the knee. For much of this time, he was in Melbourne at St Vincent's Hospital and then at the Mount Martha Rehabilitation Centre. This period was fairly traumatic for the family and we went through a long period of adjustment. My sister took on the task of looking after her brothers as Mum was working mainly night shifts at Yallourn Hospital as a nursing aid. However, Mum made sure her children were well cared for and as a treat, I was allowed to go with her to the Whist Drives conducted on Monday evenings at the primary school. As this cost two shillings each week, it really was a treat. We also went to Yallourn on Saturday afternoons by bus for the afternoon matinee, which consisted of cartoons, a serial (my favourite was Spiderman) and the main film. This outing also cost two bob and if you were lucky and avoided paying the bus fare, it also stretched to a 'sweet treat'. During this time I became more involved at the Methodist Church, now capably led by Deaconess Dorothy Clarke (not related to the St Aidan's minister!). As well as leading services and Sunday School, she introduced family activities as fundraisers. This included concerts and 'beetle drives'.

My memory of people at Newborough East during the five years we lived at 21 Childers St. are very hazy, not the people, the names. Names I do recall are David Garrett, Michael Meanie and David Green. They were relatively happy years and came to an end when we moved to 11 Fairfield Avenue, Yallourn – next door to the Lock's and the Welfare's and just up the road from Murray French.

This move was possible because the SEC, as a very responsible employer, continued to employ Dad not as a carpenter but in a position at the Briquette Factory canteen. He worked there until his retirement at age 65. My parents settled in well to Yallourn and in particular, enjoyed some success at the Yallourn Bowling Club, both winning club singles championships

and other titles during their bowling careers.

Moving to Yallourn made a great deal of difference in terms of getting around. Newborough East did not have the facilities it now enjoys so Moe or Yallourn were the options for shopping trips and both required bus transport. A relatively short walk along Fairfield Avenue brought us into the town square and a fairly good range of shops. As well the theatre, the library and all the churches were very close. It was also a relatively short walk to YHS and on most days I went home for lunch.



Jack & Hilda Blythe with Eddie, David & Peter outside No 11
Fairfield Ave

I was allocated to Form 3A, meaning (I think) the “top” group! I soon made good friends with Aidan Bottomley and Robert Morrison. Other members of the class I remember well were Robert Adams, David Wallace, Graeme Edwards, Pam Adams, Linda Milne and Kathryn Kyzlinsky. Aidan was never a well boy, having had a heart condition from birth. Both Aidan and I left after Form 4, Aidan to work as a clerk with the SEC and me to join the staff of the National Bank. However, Aidan’s health was always a problem and he died in 1960. I do know that he

had a very agile mind and always beat me at chess. I visited his parents several times after his death and they were understandably heartbroken at the loss of

their only son. Robert Morrison (a name change by deed poll in 1957) was academic by nature and I do not remember him playing sport at all. He was a great help to both Aidan and myself when we struggled with our studies. Sadly, I have not had regular contact with any of the others since leaving school after Form 4.

I do have some good memories of the two years I spent at Yallourn High School, a highlight being the day in 1956 when we went by train to the MCG for the Olympic Games. In particular, we saw Betty Cuthbert win the 200 metres, Hec Hogan in the 4 x 100 metres relay and in the decathlon, Bob Richards of the USA competing in the pole vault event. What a different scene now at the MCG – no hard wooden seats and I am sure you had a better view from the old Olympic stand than is possible from the new stands.

Soon after Term 1 started in 1956, rehearsals began for Yeomen of the Guard and I took my place as one of the peerless yeomen. That year, we performed at the Morwell Town Hall. The next year it was The Mikado and other productions followed. Thank you Graham Bartle, Val Pyers and others on staff for a great introduction to the theatre and the world of Gilbert and Sullivan.

My sporting ventures were mainly in tennis and bat tennis and I also enjoyed playing the mini golf course constructed in the school grounds. Another sport I enjoyed briefly was hockey. I think this was as a result of a brief visit to Yallourn by the Indian team (world champions and in Melbourne for the Olympic Games) a number of us boys decided to have a go. The day came when Mr Nicholls allowed the boys to play the girls. The match ended in a draw (no goals!) with one incident resulting in a lecture from Mr Nicholls. He had awarded the girls a penalty corner and the boys decided to charge noisily out of the goal area. Mr Nicholls regarded that as not in the spirit of hockey!

I would regard myself as having been an average student, resulting in my decision to leave school after Form 4. Looking back on my YHS academic experiences, probably the standout is Mr George Ellis, the headmaster who took 4A for maths. Somehow I passed at the end of the year. My life after school has been in banking, commercial work and 25 years of teaching Accounting in the TAFE system. If only boys had been welcome in the commercial stream at YHS, I may have discovered earlier that I had a flair for accounting.

Soon after arriving in Yallourn, I became part of the Methodist Church family and developed there some strong friendships, one in particular being with Arthur Poole with whom I am still in contact. The minister then was Rev Ralph Beckett who, with his wife Vera, carried out a very effective ministry caring for church members and many in the wider community. Mr Beckett was for several years a member of the YHS Advisory Committee. His next posting was to a church in Ballarat and I was fortunate again to come under the Beckett’s care and to share with them

and their four children. In about 1975, the Beckett's retired to Bentleigh. Ralph died after a long illness in 1979, however Vera (at 93) continues to live independently in Railway Crescent (with her cat). Whenever I call, I get a very warm welcome and we always reminisce (among other things) about our days in Yallourn. If you were part of the Yallourn Methodist Church, I assure you Vera will remember you, so call in and have a great chat.

After 30 years living in Greensborough, my wife, Iris and I have retired to a new home in Maddingley (part of Bacchus Marsh) and feel quite settled. Although I only lived in Newborough East for five years and Yallourn for three years, these towns were very important in preparing for the future. It has really been a good life, with more to come!