

Lane Cove Schools 1876 to 2018

A history of Lane Cove told through its schools

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Inspired by

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and

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Preface

The idea for this view of Lane Cove came to me when I attended Harmony Day at Lane Cove West Public School in 2017. To see such an extraordinary number of students proudly displaying the national costume of their parents, grandparents and forebears caused me to reflect on how our suburb has developed and how our schools represent our vibrant twenty-first century community. This is a perspective of Lane Cove seen through our schools.



Harmony Day 2017

Lane Cove West Public School

photo: the author

Early Days

Along the foreshore of Sydney Harbour large rocks stretch, tumble almost, down to the water from the land above. In Longueville Park an engraving of an emu, now partly covered by lichen, is still discernible on a level rock close to the cliff edge. Above Longueville wharf a worn path leads through the bush across lichen-covered rocks overlooking a small sandy cove. Around are eucalypts, native grasses, ferns, bottlebrushes and grevilleas. The stillness and the silence are as timeless now as they would have been for the earliest peoples of Lane Cove. And surely they are here with us still in spirit.

In the early nineteenth century European settlers clustered in small groups along the harbour foreshore. And they were few: the census of 1841 puts the population of the entire Lane Cove area, as best we can assess from the addresses given, at 168 persons¹. Of this community nineteen were aged between seven and fourteen years old and another twenty-four under the age of seven. And it seems that even this tiny community had a school, as in 1840 an advertisement for the sale of a property at Greenwich mentions a school-house².

Longueville, as Lane Cove was known at that time, was sparsely populated but growing fast and pressure was building on the government to provide more schools. At that time just fifteen students were required to qualify for a provisional school and twenty-five for a public school so residents of both Greenwich and Longueville successfully petitioned the government for provisional schools. In 1876 one was opened in Mitchell Street, Greenwich Point, and another on the east side of Woodford Bay at Pudrill's Point on the Northwood peninsula. And in 1880 the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits, opened a boarding school for boys further along the harbour foreshore at Riverview, officially named Saint Ignatius' College but known always as Riverview.

In Greenwich dwellings were concentrated in the narrow lanes and steep terrain around Greenwich Point and about a kilometre further north along the track leading from Greenwich Road down to the Bay Street Wharf³. In Northwood large family homes and substantial properties were starting to line Northwood Road, a wide graceful road leading down to Northwood wharf. Elsewhere properties were scattered along Burns Bay Road and Nicholls Bay Road, now Longueville Road, but otherwise the area was almost entirely bush and trees.

The Greenwich Point school quickly outgrew its site and in 1882 moved two streets north to Robert Street, now Leemon Reserve, growing from sixteen students enrolled in that year to forty-six ten years later, and attracting students from other harbourside suburbs, Woolwich, Birchgrove and Cockatoo Island, as well as from Greenwich itself. And as the neighbourhood continued to expand still bigger premises were needed. In 1909 a new school was opened further up the peninsula on a large site bounded by Greenwich Road, Wardrop Street and Chisholm Street. Built of red brick with graceful sandstone arches above the windows and situated on high ground, today its appearance is softened visually by mature trees reaching to

¹ www.records.nsw.gov.au/archives/collections-and-research/guides-and-indexes-census-1841/Sydney/Cumberland/Willoughby.

In *Historic Lane Cove*, Lane Cove Historical Society, 1983, L J Lind gives the population as 170.

² <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/31729239>

³ Merrilie Roberts, *Roads to the River: Prelude to a Municipality, 1884*, Lane Cove Public Library Local Studies Monograph 1982.

above the height of the roof, but in 1909 this tall, confident and imposing Federation-era building of two-storeys dominated the stark cleared landscape around it.

The Woodford Bay school opened with thirteen students then three years later moved to a more convenient site in central Longueville, next to the Congregational Chapel in Longueville Road. There it attracted fifty-two students and became a public school with separate accommodation for boys and girls. Life was a struggle for many of their parents: some worked as wood-cutters with irregular employment and the teacher was obliged to waive fees for some students although these were just three pence per child per week to a maximum of one shilling per family per week⁴.

And the community continued to grow. 1891 census figures give the population of the area as about 1,200 persons⁵, up from just a few hundred twenty years earlier. By 1901, the end of the Victorian era and the year of Federation, there were 1,906 residents, rising to 4,105 by 1910⁶. And this growth was reflected in rising school enrolments. Between 1900 and 1911 Greenwich School enrolments rose from 142 to 239. At Longueville enrolments were just 70 in 1895 but by 1915 had almost doubled to 135.

There was great excitement in Sydney in October 1910 when the British Antarctic Expedition led by Captain Robert Falcon Scott visited Australia and New Zealand on its way from England to Antarctica. The expedition was struggling financially and the stop in Australia was principally to raise funds. Past students and a former Principal⁷ relate that parents of Greenwich pupils contributed funds to provide a wooden sledge which was probably built by carpenter Alfred Samuels of North Sydney⁸. In 1913, in the aftermath of that ill-fated expedition, Greenwich school students contributed £1 13s 4d⁹ to the Antarctic Disaster Fund to provide for the dependents of those who died. At a time when the average male wage in New South Wales was £2 15s 9d per week¹⁰, a contribution of 60% of the average weekly wage was extraordinarily generous from a student body of only two hundred and forty-six students.

The sledge was later returned to Greenwich and hung on the wall inside the main door of the school. Some seventy years later, in 1986, the sledge was loaned to an exhibition called “Project Blizzard” being presented by a group working to restore and preserve Sir Douglas Mawson’s huts in Antarctica. Following this the school was advised that they might be asked to give up the sledge to a museum “so as to reduce the risk of theft and vandalism”. But after opposition from the school community this suggestion was rejected, subject to

⁴ Set in 1880 and abolished in primary schools in 1906. NSW Department of Education, History of New South Wales Government Schools. <https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/our-people-and-structure/history-of-government-schools/facts-and-figures/school-fees>

⁵ www.records.nsw.gov.au/archives/collections-and-research/guides-and-indexes/census-1891 Census district 85 Willoughby

⁶ Preliminary Report by the Government Statistician on the Vital Statistics of New South Wales for the year 1910, Government Printer 1911. Mitchell Library, Sydney.

⁷ Greenwich P&C Minutes April 1976, Lane Cove Library Local Studies.

⁸ *Scott’s Sledge at Greenwich Public School: the evidence reviewed*, by Patrick Haynes, Aurora, September 2009.

⁹ Sydney Morning Herald, February 24, 1913. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/15400309>

¹⁰ Townsville Daily Bulletin January 14, 1913. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/60067683>

recommendations on conservation and security¹¹. So the sledge remains a prized possession of the school to this day.



Captain Scott's sledge

*photo: the author
Courtesy: Greenwich Public School*

And then came the war.

¹¹ Greenwich P & C Association News Bulletin, 1986. Lane Cove Library Local Studies

The Great War

*THE EMPIRE AT WAR*¹²

proclaimed The Evening News of Sydney on Wednesday August 5 1914, one day after Great Britain had declared war on Germany. Immediately Andrew Fisher, leader of the Labor Party, campaigning for the General Election to be held on September 17, declared that it was the duty of Australians to stand to their last man and their last shilling by Australia and the mother country¹³.

The communities of Longueville and Greenwich responded as enthusiastically as the rest of the country to calls for volunteers. The New South Wales quota of 8,000 troops for the first contingent was filled within weeks and enrolment of a second began¹⁴.

Rolls of Honor inscribed with the names of those who enlisted are proudly displayed at Longueville¹⁵, Greenwich and Riverview schools. The Longueville board includes both old boys of the school and also local citizens: the school clearly saw itself as representing the wider community. It is headed 'Longueville Public School Honor Roll of those who enlisted to fight for Humanity, Justice and Liberty in the Great War 1914' and includes the names of twenty-four old boys and one hundred and five citizens.

Greenwich has two Rolls of Honor. The first includes the names of sixty-three former students and was unveiled on April 2, 1917 by the Minister of Education 'in the presence of a large assemblage of parents and scholars'¹⁶. The second contains a further nineteen names.

Riverview has three boards honouring a total of three hundred and fourteen former students, almost half of all former Riverview students. Two boards display the names of those who enlisted and survived and another shows the names of those who died¹⁷. Few of these would have been residents of Longueville as most were boarders, nevertheless the students and the community would have been known to each other and the school has always regarded itself as part of the local community.

Within four days of the declaration of war the first volunteer from Greenwich had enlisted. He was Lionel Finch¹⁸, age 29, a former student of Greenwich school by then working in Western Australia, who enrolled in the 11th AIF Infantry Battalion, raised within weeks of the declaration of war. By the end of that first heady month a further twelve local residents had enlisted, four former students of Greenwich, two from the Longueville school, and six citizens of Longueville. By the time of the first Gallipoli landings thirty-four former students

¹² <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/115813589>

¹³ The Sun, Sydney, August 5, 1914. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/229863977>

¹⁴ <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/15533899>

¹⁵ The name of the school was changed from Longueville Public School to Lane Cove Public School in 1921.

¹⁶ <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/15707230>

¹⁷ Rodgers, James, *To Give and Not to Count the Cost: Riverview and the Great War*, St Ignatius College, Riverview, 2009.

¹⁸ Australian War Memorial, Canberra, First World War Records, *Embarkation Rolls*, www.awm.gov.au/advanced-search/people

and residents had volunteered and by the time the war ended, over four long years later, a total of two hundred and eleven from Longueville and Greenwich had enlisted. Of those, thirty-five would never return¹⁹: they were killed in action, died of wounds or disease, or are forever missing.

They were young: many were still teenagers and they were predominantly under the age of thirty. The same names recur as brothers enlisted, reflecting small tightly-knit communities: from Greenwich four Armstrongs, three Collisons, two from each of the Henry, McEvoy, Phelps, Rice and Thorn families. From the Longueville community, four Swallows, three Venn-Browns²⁰, three Martyns, two from each of the Charge, Curling, Fox, Graham, Monro, Roper and Turner families.

Their trades or callings were recorded in the A.I.F. Embarkation Rolls drawn up as they left Australia for the war. They give us a glimpse of how in the early years of the last century the area was changing from small semi-agricultural villages to more complex and affluent communities as white-collar and professional livelihoods developed and replaced traditional roles.

The occupations of the enlisted men of Longueville included dairy farmer, stockman, stock driver, farm labourer, blacksmith and horsebreaker; grocer, butcher, tanner, carter and baker; there were the skilled tradesmen needed in a rapidly developing area, carpenters, electricians, surveyors, plumbers and plasterers. Scientific and technical services included mechanical engineers and the new trades of motor mechanic and motor driver. There were manufacturers; belt makers, canister makers, a brickmaker, a paper maker and printers. And increasingly, white-collar positions, bank clerks and civil servants, and the professions, accountant, stockbroker, medical practitioner. Greenwich too had farmers and also bakers, carters, labourers, carpenters, surveyors, electricians, painters and plumbers. For the new professions, clerks and law clerks, accountants, engineers, a teacher, an architect; for the new technical services, a motor bodybuilder and a telephone linesman. Manufacturers in Greenwich included canister makers and a watchmaker.

They fought at all the iconic places in Australian Great War history. In the attack on Rabaul in German New Guinea in the very first weeks of the war. At Anzac Cove from early morning of the very first day of the Gallipoli landings. At Lone Pine and at Shell Green. They were there with the heat, the dust, the dysentery, the bronchitis and the flies of summer. They were there with the cold, the gales, the blizzards, the freezing winds and the rain-flooded trenches of winter. They were there at the final evacuation in December 1915.

In France they fought and died on the Somme and in Flanders. Further afield they served in Palestine. On the Somme the summer of 1916 with exceptionally heavy rain, water-filled trenches and muddy terrain was followed by the worst winter in forty years, bleak, cold and bitter²¹. *The wounded arrive at dressing stations in a continual stream* wrote Captain Harold Taylor of Kenneth Street, Longueville²². Trenches and billets were overrun with rats and water froze in water bottles. And in Flanders, the name of Passchendaele is forever

¹⁹ Or possibly more: there are several names on the rolls which cannot be conclusively identified.

²⁰ Their sister, Rose Venn-Brown, worked with the Red Cross in France after the war.

²¹ Unit history, 9th Brigade, 34th Battalion, AWM, Canberra.

www.awm.gov.au/collection/U51474

E. Beaver and J.W.G. Meldrum, *Short history of the 34th Battalion, A.I.F.*, (Sydney: 34th Battalion A.I.F. Association, 1957).

²² www.awm.gov.au/collection/PR84/223. From Captain Taylor's diary, 26 July 1916

synonymous with ceaseless rain, thick mud, water-filled shell craters and a shattered treeless plain, a barren landscape of desolation.

The service of fifteen Lane Cove volunteers was recognised officially. *Conspicuous gallantry, courage and coolness under fire, devotion to duty, fine personal example*, recur frequently in recommendations for awards. George Pittaway, Samuel Hensby and Roy Monro all won the Military Medal, Harold Taylor and Stanley Bone the Military Cross (Captain Taylor with bar). Other awards included Mentioned in Despatches, Military Service Medal, Distinguished Conduct Medal, Distinguished Service Order, as well as French, Belgian and Romanian awards²³.

Of the thirty-five who died, three were only nineteen years old. Fourteen have no known graves. They are commemorated in perpetuity on the Lone Pine Memorial, Gallipoli, on the Menin Gate Memorial at Ypres and on the Villers-Bretonneux Memorial in the Somme valley.



Greenwich Public School
Roll of Honor

Greenwich Public School
Additional Roll of Honor

²³ <https://www.awm.gov.au>. Honours and Awards



Longueville Public School

Honor Roll

Of those who enlisted to fight for Humanity, Justice and Liberty in the Great War 1914



Riverview School

The Latin inscription translates as *'He who died so far from home, before his time, but a soldier, but for his country'* from the poem Clifton Chapel by Henry Newbolt.

*photos: the author
courtesy: the schools*

In Memoriam 1914 - 1918

<u>Roll of Honor</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Buried or Commemorated</u>
Greenwich	Herbert Lionel Ingle Finch	30	Lone Pine Memorial, Gallipoli
Longueville	Keith Chambers	22	Lone Pine Memorial, Gallipoli
Longueville	Oswald Rose	22	Lone Pine Memorial, Gallipoli
Longueville	Hugh Cyprian Holden	22	Shell Green Cemetery, Gallipoli
Longueville	Edward Charles Blanch	26	Brewery Orchard Cemetery Bois-Grenier, Nord, France
Greenwich	Arthur Rex Armstrong	19	Hollybrook Memorial, Southampton, United Kingdom
Longueville	Edward Francis McKenna	20	Rue-David Military Cemetery, Fleurbaix, Pas-de-Calais, France
Greenwich	Oscar Ernest Clark	22	Etaples Military Cemetery, Pas-de-Calais, France
Riverview and Longueville	Errol Sheridan St John Macken	21	Bapaume Post Military Cemetery, Albert, Somme, France
Longueville	Sydney George Esdaile	21	Villers-Bretonneux Memorial, Somme, France
Longueville	Cleveland Edward Starr	28	Longuenesse (St Omer) Souvenir Cemetery, Pas-de-Calais, France
Greenwich	Sydney Alfred Percival Vandyne	19	Villers-Bretonneux Memorial, Somme, France
Longueville	Ralph Charles Groves	24	Villers-Bretonneux Memorial, Somme, France
Greenwich	Percy Ernest Bergman	27	St Sever Cemetery Extension, Rouen, Seine-Maritime, France
Longueville	Hilton Thomas Weir	22	Pozieres British Cemetery, Ovillers-La Bouiselle, Somme, France
Longueville	Gilbert Conway Charge	22	Villers-Bretonneux Memorial, Somme, France
Longueville	William Alby Ahearn	32	Hermies Hill British Cemetery, Pas-de-Calais, France
Longueville and Greenwich	Alexander Boswell Armstrong	29	Villers-Bretonneux Memorial, Somme, France
Longueville	Richard Henry Hallams	19	Villers-Bretonneux Memorial, Somme, France
Longueville	William George Graham	20	Villers-Bretonneux Memorial, Somme, France
Longueville	Richard Stanley Roper	29	Villers-Bretonneux Memorial, Somme, France
Greenwich	Frederick Sydney Edington	27	Perth Cemetery (China Wall), West-Vlaanderen, Belgium
Longueville	Fred A McKinlay	25	Tyne Cot Cemetery, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium
Longueville	Frederick Haydon Baker	25	Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial, Belgium
Longueville	John William Richardson	26	Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial, Belgium
Greenwich	Leslie Ramsay Ebsworth	26	Hooge Crater Cemetery, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium
Longueville	Jack Diamond Sumners Potts	20	Jerusalem War Cemetery, Palestine
Greenwich	George Stanley Henry	27	Villers-Bretonneux Memorial, Somme, France
Longueville	Terence Ward Garling	24	Warloy-Baillon Communal Cemetery Extension, Somme, France
Greenwich	Sydney Carpenter	23	Ebblinghem Military Cemetery, Nord, France
Longueville	William Henry Charles Munro	26	Ebblinghem Military Cemetery, Nord, France
Longueville	Richard Mitchell Bradshaw	26	Vignacourt British Cemetery, Somme, France
Greenwich	Roy Henry Loubet	23	Villers-Bretonneux Military Cemetery, Somme, France
Greenwich	George Burgoyne Owen	33	Busigny Communal Cemetery Extension, Nord, France
Longueville	Samuel Hensby	30	Tidworth Military Cemetery, Wiltshire, United Kingdom

Boom, Depression then War again

On any day Burns Bay plaza in Lane Cove shopping centre is busy. Mothers with toddlers and babies in strollers, shoppers, business men and women, schoolchildren en route to or from school, friends meeting at outdoor cafés. At the weekend there might also be a concert band or community street stalls and passers-by enjoying the feel of a village centre.

And yet just over one hundred years ago cows wandered along Burns Bay Road²⁴. There was only one permanent building of just three solidly-built two-storey shops in the shopping centre. Roads were unsurfaced dirt tracks. Development didn't really start until after the war. The tram line from North Sydney had reached Lane Cove in 1909 and this encouraged developers to subdivide blocks further inland, away from the harbour, closer to the main thoroughfares of Burns Bay Road and what is now the Pacific Highway, then Gordon Road.

Then in the aftermath of the war Lane Cove boomed. It grew at a faster pace than at any time before or since²⁵. Population almost trebled in a decade, increasing from 5,250 in 1918 to 14,100 in 1928²⁶. The under-14 age group in Lane Cove doubled between 1921 and 1933 from 2,292 to 4,138²⁷.

But Australia and Lane Cove were not immune to the epidemic of influenza which caused some fifty million deaths world-wide. The New South Wales Government Statistician reported that deaths in 1919 were 30% above the average of the previous five years due to the epidemic of influenza. Deaths in Lane Cove rose during the epidemic, although the overall numbers are low, rising from thirteen in 1910 to twenty-eight in 1918, thirty-seven in 1919, then dropping back to twenty-nine in 1920²⁸. The parish priest of the newly-created Roman Catholic parish of St. Michael's felt unable to call upon his parishioners for a foundation stone because of the epidemic²⁹. Local councils were granted increased temporary loan overdrafts to carry out extra work to relieve the unemployment created by the compulsory closure of certain businesses. The 'Influenza Depot Master' in Lane Cove kept the depot open all night and provided night transport for nurses³⁰.

Nevertheless, new schools sprang up and existing schools expanded.

²⁴ Lane Cove Local Studies photographic collection, Lane Cove Library.

²⁵ Both in absolute and percentage terms, apart from the very early days.

²⁶ Preliminary Report by the Government Statistician on the Vital Statistics of New South Wales for the year 1918, Mitchell Library, Sydney.

Report by the Government Statistician on the Vital Statistics of New South Wales for the year 1928, Mitchell Library, Sydney.

²⁷ Censuses of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1921 and 1933. Part I New South Wales. Analysis of Population in Local Government Areas. Until 1967 census data excluded full-blooded Aborigines.

²⁸ Preliminary Reports by the Government Statistician on the Vital Statistics of NSW for the years 1910 and 1918, Mitchell Library, Sydney.

Reports by the Government Statistician on the Vital Statistics of New South Wales for the years 1919 and 1920, Mitchell Library, Sydney.

²⁹ *Make This Your Home! A Chronicle of St Michael's Parish, Lane Cove, 1922-1976*. Fergus Cloran, St. Michael's Church, 1976.

³⁰ Minutes of Lane Cove Council meeting 24 February 1919.

In 1922, the Catholic Church opened a school on the St. Michael's Church site at the corner of Little and Dorritt Streets run by nuns from North Sydney. In 1928 they bought land at the corner of Longueville Road and Alpha Street to build a convent and establish a bigger school. In the 1930s rooms were added to the back of the school to form a high school, taking students up to third class of secondary school.

From 1923 Riverview took day students as well as boarders.

The school in Longueville Road, which had started in 1878 on a two-acre site for some 52 students, was badly overcrowded by 1916. A proposal to buy three small blocks of land was rejected although the school could provide seating for only 116 pupils and 135 were enrolled. Then after the war, during the optimistic years of the 1920s, the school was at last able to expand. In 1920 a substantial two-storey brick building with accommodation for 192 pupils was erected proudly displaying the sign 'PUBLIC SCHOOL 1920', clearly visible from Longueville Road. But facilities were still very cramped. In 1923 a further one acre of land was purchased, followed by another half-acre in 1926 and another half-acre again in 1928, relieving pressure on space and enabling the construction of new classrooms. The need for more space can be understood by looking at the rise in enrolments, which more than tripled in the twenty years between 1915 and 1935, from 135 in 1915 to 338 in 1921, 415 in 1922 and 450 by 1935³¹.

Greenwich enrolments which were 225 in 1910 were 407 twenty years later.

In 1928 the Christian Scientists opened Hillcrest School as a day and boarding school based in a Federation home on Kingslangley Road, Greenwich³². This gracious and elegant property with creeper-covered walls, formal gardens, winding tree-lined paths and views across the Greenwich peninsula to the harbour was situated on over five acres of land stretching from Kingslangley Road through to River Road and included two tennis courts and an oval. At its peak the school taught 200 primary and secondary students.

From the mid-1920s the increase in the school-age population was creating a need for schools in the west and north of Lane Cove. To the north, on Mowbray Road, the Department of Education acquired bushland adjoining orchards and designated it the site for a high school³³. To the west, in 1929 the Department acquired land west of Cullen Street and gave approval for the establishment of an Infants' School³⁴.

Other schools included Morven Garden School on the Pacific Highway from 1918 to 1923 and a school at St Giles' Church in Greenwich until 1919. In 1923 Lorna Hodgkinson bought two and a quarter acres on the Pacific Highway at Gore Hill, including the site of the old Morven Garden School, and founded the Sunshine Institute for children with intellectual disabilities. As the Lorna Hodgkinson Sunshine Home, it survived until the 1990s, catering for disabled children and adults. Further up the Pacific Highway at Gore Hill was St. Joseph's Orphanage, 3 storeys-high, set high up on the ridge line of the Highway. This large institution

³¹ Lind, L. J. Ed., *Lane Cove Public School Centenary Book 1876 – 1976*, Lane Cove Public School Centenary Book Committee, 1976

³² Photograph in Greenwich Public School vertical file in Lane Cove Library Local Studies.

³³ The Sydney Weekly, May 14-20, 2002

³⁴ Kearney, Elma, *Lane Cove West Public School: 40 Years*, Lane Cove West Public School P&C Association, 1990

dominated the landscape and housed and educated girls to primary school level and in domestic and farming skills in a semi-rural environment. It survived until 1979.

And then came The Great Depression. In 1934 with no jobs available there were five 6th-grade classes at Lane Cove as children stayed at school longer. A plate was taken round classes for leftover sandwiches to give to children who had no lunch³⁵.

‘St Elmo’ the grand mansion built in 1910 by James Tomlin in Longueville Road was converted into a private school, ‘Woodley Preparation School’, in 1940. The school was evidently highly regarded, attracting students from McMahan’s Point, Drummoyne and Roseville as well as more local Lane Cove districts³⁶. Children as young as two-and-a-half were enrolled, but most were four or five years old and stayed for three or four years. It continued until 1970 when it became Currambena School.

And then came war, again. Australia did not welcome the outbreak of war in 1939 as enthusiastically as it had a generation before: memories of the Great War were still prominent in people’s minds. The Sydney Morning Herald described the country as an ‘anxious spectator’³⁷.

But the bombing of Darwin on Thursday 19 February 1942 shocked the nation. Suddenly nowhere was safe. Across the country communities immediately rallied to construct air raid shelters. By the weekend, just two days later, parents were rushing to construct trenches on school premises and to shatter-proof windows by pasting mosquito netting on to the glass³⁸. Trenches were dug in a zigzag pattern to minimise the risk of casualties in the event of bombing. Trenches at the Lane Cove and Greenwich schools and at St Michael’s Church can be clearly seen on aerial images from 1943. Lane Cove Council also constructed trenches at Coronation Viewpoint on the Pacific Highway³⁹. All these defences have now disappeared under later development.

³⁵ Recollections of former pupil Norma Scott in Lind, L. J. Ed., *Lane Cove Public School Centenary Book 1876 – 1976*, Lane Cove Public School Centenary Book Committee, 1976.

³⁶ Woodley Preparation School Admission Book 1956 to 1965, Lane Cove Library Local Studies.

³⁷ Sydney Morning Herald 5 September 1939 <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/17630968>

³⁸ Sydney Morning Herald 23 February 1942 <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/17789202>

³⁹ <https://maps.six.nsw.gov.au> I am indebted to Naomi Bassford, Local History Coordinator at Lane Cove Library, for alerting me to the existence of these maps, prepared by the NSW Land Registry Services.



Trenches at Lane Cove Public School, in the centre of the southern boundary of the school



Trenches at Greenwich Public School, north-north-east of the main building

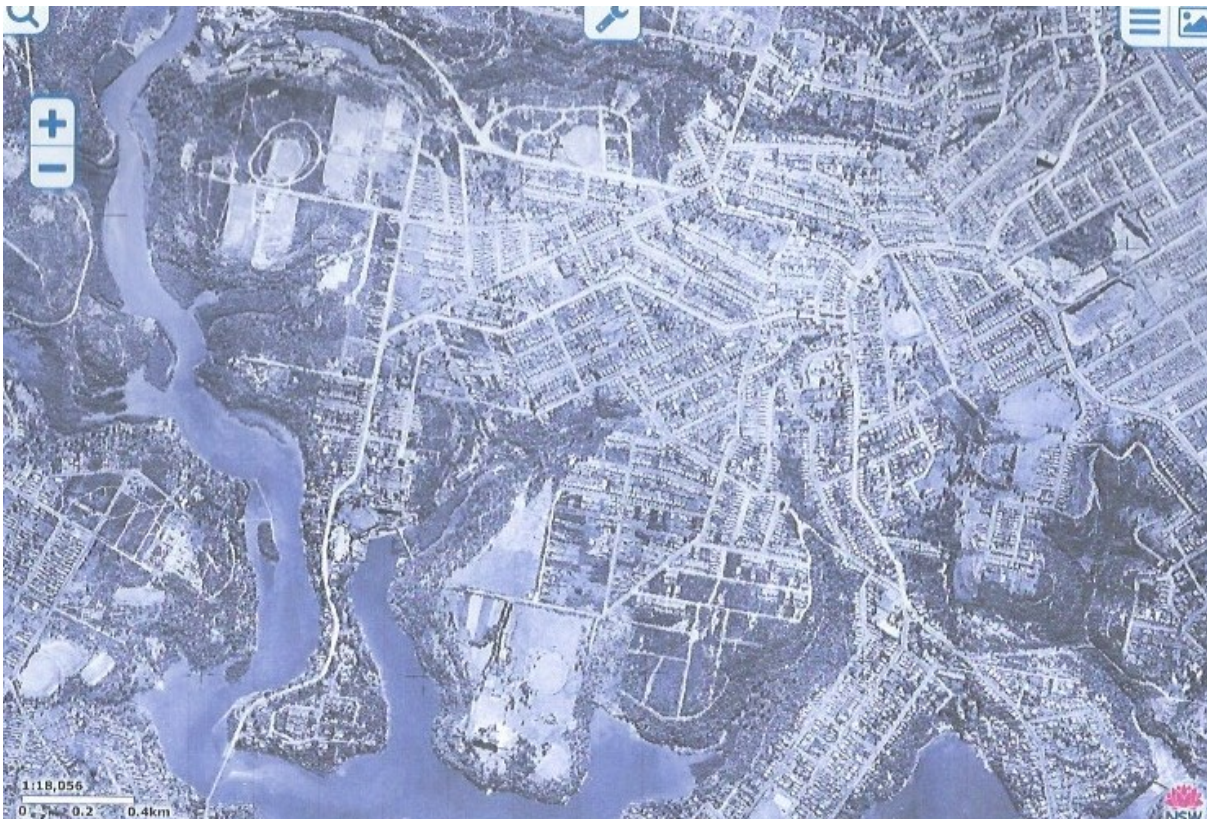


Trenches behind St. Michael's Church, on Dorritt Street

The Baby Boomers

If we could have looked down from space in the early 1940s we would have seen that our suburb had large swathes of undeveloped land⁴⁰.

Osborne Park, Lane Cove West and the southern part of Riverview were still open ground or bushland. Up on the Pacific Highway St Joseph's Orphanage included a farm and still had most of its original ten acres⁴¹. The only residential buildings in the area between the Pacific Highway, Second Avenue and the bushland which became Lane Cove Country Club and Golf Course were on the south-west corner of Second Avenue and Osborne Road, south of the Ronald Avenue intersection. First Avenue was just a path from Osborne Road to Phoenix Street. Fourth Avenue was just a narrow boundary between bushland to the west and open ground to the east. Much of southern Riverview, between St Ignatius' College and Hodgson Park, was still bushland. Over in Lane Cove West Wood Street was still a narrow track with no buildings on either side. There was a dairy farm but very few houses in Cullen Street. In the north of Lane Cove there were roads and tracks off Epping Road and Mowbray Road but very little housing. Lane Cove Industrial Park did not exist.



Then in the immediate aftermath of the war as servicemen and women returned home, built houses and formed families the school-age population of Lane Cove increased rapidly, just as

⁴⁰ <https://maps.six.nsw.gov.au/> includes aerial maps from 1943.

⁴¹ Family Magazine, 25 January 1981.

it had after the First World War. Between the censuses of 1947 and 1954 the under-14 age group rose from 4,719 to 5,566 and Osborne Park, Riverview, Lane Cove West and North blossomed. In contrast to the elaborate homes of the Federation era and the solid sometimes-flamboyant Californian bungalows of the nineteen-twenties and -thirties modest, sensible War Service homes were constructed in these previously undeveloped areas.

And in those immediate post-war years this expansion was reflected in our schools. In 1930 enrolments at Greenwich had peaked at 407 then fell to just 239 in 1943. Then numbers steadily rose to reach 417 in 1953. When Hillcrest School in Kingslangley Road closed in 1950 there was concern that the site might be developed for housing. After representations from the local community, which included conducting a census of local residents to establish the school-age population⁴², the school and site were bought by the Education Department. There was some discussion as to whether it should be a separate school, 'Greenwich Heights', but it was eventually decided to establish two separate campuses for Greenwich Primary School, with Infants on the Greenwich Road and Primary on the Kingslangley Road sites.

Lane Cove too was struggling to cope with increased numbers. Enrolments rose from 830 in 1945 to 1072 in 1953, before peaking at 1,191 in 1969. So as the baby boomers grew up enrolments at Greenwich and Lane Cove peaked in the 1950s and 1960s and as that generation grew older declined slowly for the next three decades.

In 1970 Woodley Preparation School closed and was restructured as Currambena School, as the Currambena community wished to develop a pre-school and primary school with a more democratic and co-operative educational ethos than was available elsewhere. In the 1970s Lane Cove, St. Michael's and Currambena were all able to acquire properties adjoining the schools which relieved some of the pressure on space. Lane Cove purchased two small blocks of land in Austin Street adjacent to the school and both St Michael's and Currambena acquired properties in Longueville Road.

Lane Cove West and Mowbray, the two newest schools, have had a more chequered history. Responding to requests for a school in Lane Cove West, in 1929 the Department of Education acquired four acres of land north of the intersection of Mars and Cullen Streets. The Department evidently considered this to be an appropriate land size for a school, although later the southern part of the site was sold and subdivided for housing. It wasn't until 1951 that a school was opened, and then only an Infants school with fifty-one students⁴³. A primary school was added in 1953 to give a total of 198 students. Mowbray, whose catchment area includes much of Lane Cove North, had a similar struggle to exist. Although land had been reserved in the 1920s it was not until 1952 after strong parental pressure that a primary school with initially just twenty students was opened on this site, which had originally been intended for a high school.

And although Lane Cove West was expanding as a residential area, the school struggled to maintain the numbers required to entitle it to an adequate number of teaching positions. Enrolments peaked in 1958 with 348 students, with class sizes of up to fifty-three, then

⁴² John May, *A short history of Greenwich Community Association 1944 – 2014*, <http://www.greenwich.org.au/Documents/GCA%20History.pdf>

⁴³ Kearney, Elma, *Lane Cove West Public School: 40 Years*, Lane Cove West Public School P&C Association, 1990

declined slowly to a low of barely 200 in 1972. Reasons were thought to be increasing industrial development to the immediate west of the school, and heavy traffic on Epping Road and Burns Bay Road which discouraged children from walking to school⁴⁴. In later years construction of the Epping Road pedestrian overpass and the closure of access to the industrial estate from the eastern side of Mars Road (now named Banksia Close) counteracted these disadvantages.

In 1991 Mowbray had an enrolment of fewer than 200 students, as with poor equipment it struggled to be an attractive choice for parents. The P&C Association undertook to campaign for better facilities. It considered that science equipment was 'minimal and totally inadequate', the library was just 'a room with books in it', facilities more suited to a school of twelve to fifteen years ago⁴⁵. Within a few years enrolments were rising and there was no longer a risk of the school closing⁴⁶.



Then as the twentieth century drew to its end St Joseph's Orphanage and the Lorna Hodgkinson Sunshine Home closed as it was felt that young people were better served by being part of the wider community. They no longer belonged in institutions. And the concept of OOSH (Out Of School Hours) care developed.

Ideas of what education should consist of were changing.

⁴⁴ Notes for speech by Mr.O.R.Jones,BA., Director of Primary Education, at the official opening of the Assembly Hall, 20 October, 1991.

⁴⁵ Mowbray P&C Association Strategic Plan, February 1991, Mowbray vertical file, Chatswood Library

⁴⁶ Flyer in Mowbray vertical file, Lane Cove Library

Into the 21st Century

My youngest granddaughter started in year 7 at a new school earlier this year and overheard this conversation:

Girl 1: *Where did you come from?*

Girl 2: *Well, my mum comes from (country xxx) and my dad comes from (country yyy) and then.... (followed by long story about her family history)*

Girl 1, bewildered: *No, I meant what primary school did you go to?*

In the first national census, held in 1911, 82.3% of the Australian population of 3,667,670 were born in Australia. A further 13.3% were born in Great Britain or Ireland, 0.7% in Germany and 1.0% elsewhere in Europe. Only a tiny percentage were born in Asia, 0.5% in China and 0.4% elsewhere in Asia⁴⁷.

Reflecting this, the Lane Cove Roll of Honour for the First World War⁴⁸ portrays a community overwhelmingly of British or Irish descent (even if we allow for some Anglicisation of names, as happened during the war when, for instance, Müller became Miller and, most famously, Saxe-Coburg-Gotha became Windsor).

The immediate post-World War II period saw the first substantial change in the composition of the Australian population. Between 1947 and 1961 the number of Australian residents born outside Australia increased from 744,187 to 1,778,780⁴⁹, from 10% to 17% of the total, most of these being Europeans leaving their war-ravaged continent. The number born in Asia more than doubled, increasing from 36,790 to 79,088 but still only comprised 0.7% of the Australian population, proportionately fewer than in 1911. The ethnic mix in Lane Cove barely altered. In a 1961 community of 23,723 just over 2% were of European and fewer than 2% of Chinese nationality.

Compare this then to the 2016 census. Only 35% of Lane Cove residents had both parents born in Australia. A greater number (45%) had both parents born overseas, principally in China, England or India, while others had one parent born overseas. A total of 115 separate nationalities or ethnic groups are specifically identified⁵⁰ including Algerian, Brazilian, Hispanic North-American, Sikh, Tamil, Azeri and Salvadoran. The Lane Cove West school currently has students representing forty-one language-speaking backgrounds⁵¹.

In the two decades between 1996 and 2016 the population of Lane Cove increased by 20% from 30,107 to 36,051. In the following year, in one year alone, it rose to 38,782, the fastest single-year growth in our history. The school-age demographic increased strongly too. The substantial rise in the number of under 5s as well as in the 5 to 14 age group in recent censuses points to increasing pressure on school enrolments.

⁴⁷ The census was remarkably detailed and showed that Australia attracted immigrants from across the world; countries listed included Armenia, Sarawak, Venezuela, Iceland and Afghanistan. (Until 1967 census data excluded full-blooded Aboriginals).

⁴⁸ Listing 284 names, on display in the foyer of the Council Chambers

⁴⁹ Census data, 1947 to 1961.

⁵⁰ 2016 census. Cultural diversity ANC2P, Lane Cove.

⁵¹ <http://www.lanecovew-p.schools.nsw.edu.au/principal-s-note>

The early years of this century have seen some remarkable changes in our schools. Between 2007 and 2010 the Building Education Revolution provided new halls and classrooms to all Lane Cove schools. In more recent years Mowbray has been completely rebuilt. OOSH and holiday care programs have been expanded and now provide care for students outside conventional school hours. Some OOSH centres provide meals. Unconventional ideas have been introduced: at Lane Cove West last year a year 6 class designed, sourced finance for materials, and then constructed a functional and avant-garde chicken coop.

Lane Cove West and Mowbray, which so remarkably struggled to remain viable in the 1960s and 70s (Lane Cove West) and 1980s and 90s (Mowbray) that they had to actively seek enrolments saw enormous increases in their student populations. Lane Cove West enrolments increased from 215 in 1996 to 588 in 2017, and enrolments at Mowbray more than doubled, rising from 218 to 526 over the same period.

Year	Lane Cove Population ⁵²			School enrolments ⁵³			
	Total	0 to 4 years	5 to 14 years	Greenwich	Lane Cove	Lane Cove West	Mowbray
1996	30,107	1,661	3,258	299	819	215	218
2001	30,340	1,755	3,467	320	844	200	280
2006	30,427	1,942	3,608	338	792	287	261
2011	31,510	2,156	3,809	401	809	485	322
2016	36,051	2,425	4,244	495	840	579	437
2017	38,782			483	849	588	526

St. Michael's currently has 550 students and Currambena has 102.

The Department of Education does not now publish projections of future enrolments. But in August 2015⁵⁴ it forecast enrolments in 2020 of 590 for Greenwich, 839 for Lane Cove, 574 for Lane Cove West, and 458 for Mowbray. Apart from Greenwich, all these figures are lower than actual enrolments in 2017 which confirms community concern and anecdotal evidence that these are under-estimates.

So both the size of Lane Cove's population and its ethnic mix continue to grow. At Harmony Day in 2017 at Lane Cove West the number of ethnicities included Mauritius, Algeria, Korea, India, China, Hong Kong, England, Curaçao, Ireland, USA, Norway, Nepal, Wales, the Philippines, Scotland, Singapore, South Africa, Japan, Sweden, Poland, Germany⁵⁵.

So reflecting on the conversation at the start of this chapter, we are now merging into one unique Australian nationality.

⁵² www.censusdata.abs.gov.au 1996 to 2016; stats.abs.gov.au 2017

⁵³ NSW Department of Education: Statistics & Analysis Unit, Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation.

⁵⁴ Department of Education projections, August 2015, published in The Village Observer, Lane Cove, September 2015

⁵⁵ Author's observation



Harmony Day 2017
Lane Cove West Public School

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