

Granite Town Public School 1926-1933 Part 1

By Bill Glennie

‘There is a satisfactory case for the establishment of a school’

The construction of employees’ cottages at Moruya Quarry began in May 1925 and the first five were ready for occupation in July.ⁱ In an interview given to the *Sydney Morning Herald* in August, Lawrence Ennis, the Director of Construction of the Harbour Bridge, gave his seal of approval to the name for the new community. ‘The company proposes to establish a model township – called Granite Town – near the quarry. Houses for the accommodation of the workers are being built on a site facing the river and the mountains, and the residences, which are of the bungalow type, will be let to the men’.ⁱⁱ It may well be the first recorded use of the name. By February 1926 twenty-one cottages were occupied. The building continued apace, for Dorman Long & Co, the Bridge contractors, had recruited thirty additional stonemasons, five quarrymen and two tool smiths from Aberdeen, most of whom were bringing their families with them. They were expected in Granite Town in two contingents in April and July 1926.

On 3 April 1926 the *Moruya Examiner* reported the formation of a Granite Town Progress Association ‘which has already done good work towards the advancement of the village’.ⁱⁱⁱ One piece of good work the Association embarked on was to begin moves to have a school built in Granite Town. On 17 February stonemason Arthur Gerrard, the Association’s secretary, wrote to Thomas Mutch, the Minister for Education, drawing his attention to ‘the urgent necessity of a school at the very earliest opportunity’. There were nineteen children of school age in Granite Town, he told him, and he appended a list of their names and ages which included those of his own son and daughter. With further children expected from Scotland, Gerrard suggested to the Minister that the number would shortly reach forty-five or fifty. On the same day he sent letters to the two local MLAs, Henry Bate and Patrick Stokes – the latter doubled as Lord Mayor of Sydney – asking for their support in lobbying the Minister to provide a school. In his letter to Stokes Gerrard inflated the likely school population to ‘anything up to fifty or sixty children’.^{iv}

Granite Town would get its school, but not until 29 September 1926 did it open its door to pupils, and when it did it was immediately clear that the building and staffing provision were inadequate. Within a

month the secretary of the Granite Town Progress Association was once more reaching for pen and paper to write to the Minister for Education. What had gone wrong?

It began so well. Both MLAs did what Gerrard hoped they would do, each writing to Thomas Mutch. ‘Be good enough to give some consideration to the request’, wrote Stokes. Bate offered more: ‘I do hope you will see your way to accede to this very reasonable request. I would be glad to have an interview with you when I return to the city’.

Mutch took action. W. M. West, the Cooma-based District Inspector of Schools, was instructed to visit Moruya. On 9 March West was at the quarry and on the same day completed an interim report confirming what Arthur Gerrard had told the Minister. In fact there were now twenty-two prospective pupils in the village following the arrival of another family. Only seven of them were enrolled at Moruya Public School, ‘but attend very irregularly, owing principally to the distance, about 2½ miles’. There were also two families who opted to have their children ferried across the river to attend Newstead Public School. The New South Wales Government paid a subsidy of 3d per day for each of the six children. The inspector confirmed, too, the imminent arrival of children from Aberdeen but had no figures. He concluded that there was ‘a satisfactory case for the establishment of a school which could have a certain tenure of five years and a great probability of a longer period of existence’.

West spoke with John Gilmore, the Quarry Manager. Gilmore expressed a willingness to help in the erection of a school, but West thought it best to approach ‘Mr McInnes’ (sic), Dorman Long’s General Manager, ‘with a view to ascertaining to what extent the firm are willing to co-operate with the Department in the cost of construction’. Mr Ennis, however, would delegate all matters relating to the proposed school to his deputy in Sydney, Alfred Martin.

‘I recommend that a school be established. The need is urgent’

It happened that Martin was due at the quarry on 10 March. He would have wanted to inspect the preparations underway there for the arrival of the thirty masons recruited from Aberdeen. West stayed on in Moruya and took the opportunity to interview

Martin. The latter had details of the Aberdonian families expected in Sydney in mid-April on the *Barrabool*. There would be twenty-eight children in the group, twenty of them of school age. Martin added that ten – the figure should have been nine – more families were expected in July. He told West that Dorman Long had spent £60,000 establishing the quarry and he assured him that it would continue to function after the completion of the Harbour Bridge.¹

A week later Alfred Martin called on Stephen Smith, the Under-Secretary at the Department of Education. He learned that the Department accepted the need to provide a school, but Martin advised Smith that the company was not prepared to assist in its building. He did offer to convey all necessary building materials from Sydney on one of the company's three steamers which transported Moruya's granite to the construction site – 'at reduced rates of freight'. There would be no free ride for the Department. The Under-Secretary inquired about the possibility of purchasing the site at Granite Town. Martin would have to discuss that with Ennis. The next day he wrote to Smith. 'We have now fully gone into this matter and very much regret to advise that we would not care to sell to you the two acres of land for the proposed school site'. Instead Dorman Long offered the site at a nominal rental of £5 per annum. The letter confirmed the offer of reduced freight charges, adding 'We would be prepared to give you every facility for getting the material from the quarry wharf to the site'. Again, Martin confirmed that it was Dorman Long's intention to make the quarry a permanent workplace.

Under-Secretary Smith was dismayed. 'The offer made by the firm can hardly be regarded as a generous one, particularly with regard to the site, but it seems hardly fair that the children concerned should be deprived of their education any longer than is necessary'.

The Department of Education had expectations of rural communities which requested the establishment of a school. 'Owing to the high cost of new buildings and the very uncertain life of a bush school which may close at any time (often if only one family removes from the settlement) the parents should be asked to give some assistance in the manner indicated'. Some examples were given: 'The digging of the closet pits and block holes; providing sleepers for closets and tank stand; short blocks for foundation and long ones for school steps mean considerable expense for the Department but very little if any for

the local residents if a "working bee" be formed'. The Department's guideline concluded, 'No direct monetary assistance is asked, but the Department confidently anticipates that a little time and labour will be given'.

Alfred Martin might have taken issue with the term 'bush school' in relation to the community at Granite Town. Nevertheless, the assistance offered by Dorman Long's management in Sydney was grudging. In contrast, and perhaps not surprisingly, the quarry management was prepared to be far more accommodating. John Gilmore's offer to lend a hand in the building of the school may have been vetoed by Alfred Martin, but his offer of free granite for its foundations was endorsed.

On the same day that Martin called on the Under-Secretary, Inspector West was completing his final report. On the official questionnaire which the Department provided for such applications, West predicted a school population of approximately fifty by the end of April 1926 and because he believed there should be 'provision for natural increase' he recommended a building of two rooms, described as 'Stock Plan No 9 (Wood)'. He noted that the site earmarked on the northern edge of the village was located on well drained ground, had a pleasant outlook, and was accessible. There was no need for a surrounding fence because of the absence of traffic, so it would be sufficient to lease an area of one acre from Dorman Long. He ended, 'I recommend that a school be established. The need is urgent'.

But it took the Department three more weeks to confirm it would provide a school. Dorman Long's offer to convey materials to the site at reduced rates was accepted. As for the company's proposal to lease the site for an annual rental of £5, the Department wrote to Alfred Martin on 20 April that in such situations 'invariably school sites are leased to the Department at a peppercorn rental and it is hoped that on reflection your firm will fall in with the usual procedure'.

Martin reflected, no doubt with some prompting from Lawrence Ennis, and on 23 April replied that the company would be only too pleased to fall in with the usual procedure. He added, showing concern for the lack of progress: 'We trust that in view of the fact that there are many children of school age now at the quarry and a further twenty-six or twenty-seven arriving on the *Barrabool* (now at Melbourne) the

¹ In his interview with the *Sydney Morning Herald* in August 1925 Lawrence Ennis had quoted £48,000 as the amount spent at the Quarry. Martin's figure can be partly explained by the extension work then underway to the

dressings sheds, and the cost of bringing out and accommodating additional men and their families from Aberdeen. It may also have strengthened the argument in favour of a school to round the figure upwards.

completion of the plans and the erection of the school will be expedited’.

It would be five weeks before the rental agreement was signed between Dorman Long and the Department of Education, the Department agreeing to the payment of ‘*one peppercorn if demanded*’ for ten years beginning on 1 July 1926 for the one acre recommended by Inspector West.

‘Possibly the case can be met by instructing the Architect to design a cheaper type of building’

Unfortunately the Department rejected West’s recommendation to provide a two-roomed school. The Department had doubts about the long-term prospects for the quarry. ‘Presumably when this work ceases in about six years, there will be a reduced demand for school facilities. This raises the question as to whether the Department is justified in providing the whole of the expenditure necessary in the provision of a school. Possibly the case can be met by instructing the Architect to design a cheaper type of building, having regard to the fact of its limited use’. This decision to instruct the Departmental Architect to prepare plans for a temporary one-roomed building to accommodate fifty children contributed to the delay in the appearance of the school.

The Department was also guilty of muddled thinking. West and his superiors in Sydney were agreed on one thing: the school roll would likely grow and there would be need to provide for this. West’s two-roomed recommendation allowed for future growth. The Department’s approach, on the other hand, was to wait and deal with growth when it happened.

West could have been more precise with the predicted school roll. In a covering letter sent with the completed questionnaire on 20 March he wrote that the arrival of the additional children from Scotland in mid-April ‘will increase the number of children of school age to above forty’ whereas in the questionnaire he stated the figure as ‘approximately 50 by the end of April 1926’. In fact West knew the likely figure would be forty-nine. He knew there were now twenty-three workers’ children of school age in Granite Town; he knew, too, another six children were ferried across to Newstead; and Alfred Martin had told him there would be twenty children of school age due on the *Barrabool*. But Martin had also told him that further families would arrive in July. Although West had made a brief reference to them in his interim report on 9 March, neither in his covering letter nor on the official form did he include them. The *Pakeha* would bring ten further children to Granite Town, six of them of school age. West’s statement that ‘the enrolment will exceed forty at the

time of opening’ was misleading. It would exceed fifty. During July and August the Drummoyne Carpentry Workshops were preparing a building which would not be fit for purpose.

There may have been an element of penny-pinching in the Department’s thinking. West’s two-roomed school would have required two teachers at a time when Thomas Mutch had to contend with a shortage of teachers and a lack of funds. Matters would come to a head at the beginning of 1927 when Thomas Mutch publicly accused Premier Jack Lang – there was no love lost between the two men – of starving his department of money. That criticism brought his ministerial career to an end soon after.

The children of Granite Town waited. While the Drummoyne carpenters worked on the prefabricated sections of their school, there was growing impatience at the quarry. On 6 August John Gilmore wrote to Henry Bate. ‘At the present time we have 50 - 55 children of school age who would attend the school and who now have to proceed to the Moruya School. The lease etc has been completed some time, but up to the present apparently nothing further has been done’. Bate wrote to the Under-Secretary, enclosing Gilmore’s letter and adding ‘It is wonderful how the “Town” has grown up. I wish you would do all possible to expedite this matter’. Not until 26 August was the Under-Secretary in a position to inform Bate that the necessary materials had been shipped and workmen were on their way to start building operations. On 4 September 1926 the *Moruya Examiner* had good news to report. ‘The Granite Town Public School was erected last week, the building having come from Sydney in sections’.^v The school and the three pan closets for the use of girls, boys and staff awaited use. Three weeks later came the bad news: ‘The date of the opening of the new school is still indefinite, as furniture and other equipment are yet to be provided. The building itself is complete, including the painting’.^{vi}

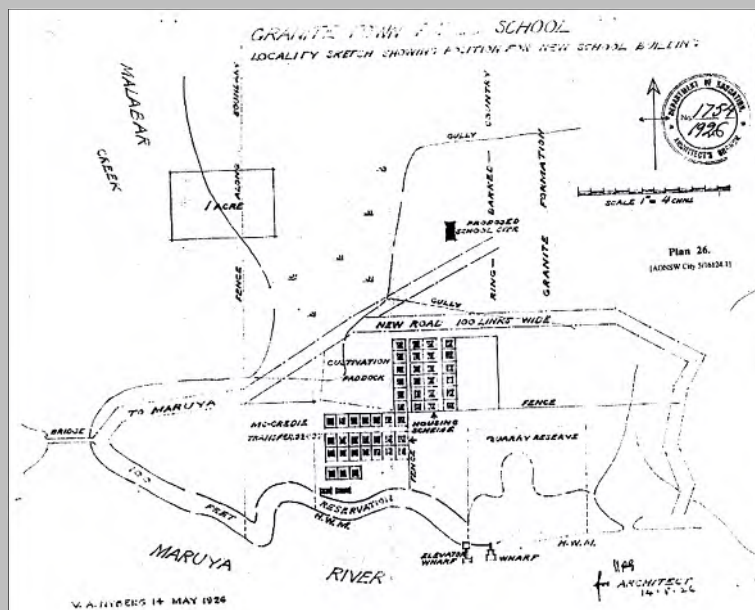
Bureaucracy had taken precedence over good sense. A departmental memo of 27 April instructed that ‘school materials should only be forwarded as soon as it is known that a teacher has been appointed’. Securing a teacher does not appear to have been straightforward – in the first fifteen months of the school’s existence there were three appointments as head master. Until the arrival of the first at the beginning of 1927, a relieving teacher, John Carter, took charge.^{vii}

Carter must have been in place by 21 September for only then was it noted that ‘the following furniture will be required for the portable room being erected at Granite Town: 5 large desks and forms 8’ 4” long, 5 small desks and forms 8’ 4” long, 1 table, 1 press,

1 chair'. It was left to Carter to arrange for the transport of the furniture on the last leg of its journey from Sydney. 'This furniture was not in the school when I took charge and had to be carted from Moruya at a cost of 4/-. Please refund', he wrote to Inspector West on 8 October. On the same day he informed

West that no provision had been made for a water supply for the use of the children. West instructed him to obtain a water tank 'at the most reasonable cost possible'. The case was marked 'Urgent'.

RIGHT: 'How fortunate we children were with our school, situated where it was' wrote Ruby Webberley. The two classrooms can be seen in the distance in the extreme left of this photograph of Granite Town taken in 1929. The large building (centre right) is the Recreation Hall which opened in September 1927 and which was put to good use by the school and the residents. Granite Town children had no excuse for being late for school.



LEFT: This map drawn on 14 May 1926 in the Architect's Branch of the Department of Education shows the proposed site for the school on the north side of Granite Town. Forty-eight houses are either completed or under construction. The two blocks of accommodation for single men – one for the exclusive use of Italian workmen – are also shown adjacent to the river. Fences divide Granite Town from the nearby quarry. The map seems to be the work of someone not familiar with Moruya or its spelling.

Freshly painted, newly furnished but as yet without a water tank, Granite Town Public School opened for business on 29 September 1926. The community had already been fund-raising. A collection at the quarry raised £9 in aid of a children's picnic to celebrate the school's opening. A whist drive and dance were held in one of the bachelors' blocks during which Bill Morrison, the stonemasons' foreman, presented Arthur Smith – 'Smithy' – with a silk shirt 'as a token of appreciation from the parents in whose children he had taken such a kindly interest in conveying them to and from the Moruya school'. The services of Smithy's converted lorry would no longer be required.



ABOVE: Smithy's lorry, converted into a seated bus, was used by the Granite Town parents to transport their children to Moruya Public School while they awaited the appearance of the school promised by the Department of Education.

Arthur Smith, the proprietor of the Hotel Adelaide, carried more than schoolchildren. Ruby Webberley (second from right at the back of the bus) describes waiting at Smithy's terminus at Granite Town for the Saturday morning shopping trip to Moruya. 'If he wasn't there at the time, we knew it wouldn't be long before he returned. His shuttle service was very welcome and his happy greetings pleased everyone. Mother always declared her fingerprints must be embedded on the side of the truck because of the quite reckless way he tackled the bumpy road to Moruya. If the women let out a squeal, he just laughed and shouted: "Just hang on!"'.

'The children's education is at a standstill'

The number of children attending on that first day is unrecorded, but when John Carter wrote to West on 8 November to tell him he had secured a 1000 gallon tank at a bargain price he informed him that there were sixty-six children in attendance – in a building designed for fifty.

Less than a month after the school's opening, the Granite Town Progressive Association sprang into action. There was a new secretary – Fred Bunker – and a minor name change – Progress had given way to Progressive – but the strategy was the same: letters were sent to the Minister for Education and the two local MLAs.

Bunker described the situation to the Minister in graphic terms: 'This school, which is 24 feet by 21 feet, has now 64 pupils (and owing to illness 4 children have not as yet attended) so you will see that leaves less than 8 square feet per scholar, and I believe more houses are likely to be erected in this vicinity, thus we feel the position is likely to become very acute. The children's ages in this school range from 5 years (Infant Class) to 14 years (Class 6) and we are of the opinion that the task is too great, and that the children's education must suffer to a very large extent'. Bunker requested the appointment of an additional teacher and asked if further accommodation could be provided.

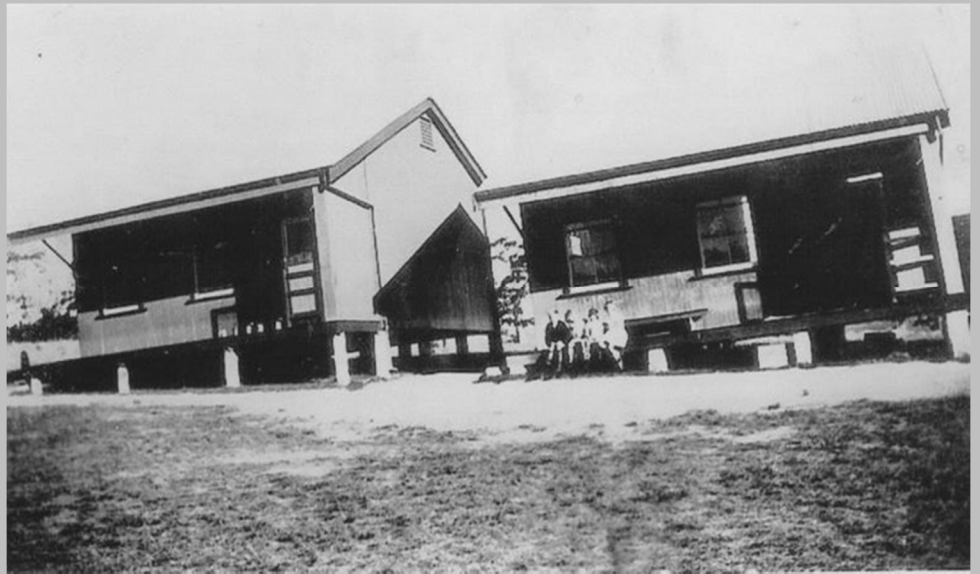
It was left to Stephen Smith, the Under-Secretary, to deal with the matter. In letters to Bunker, Bate and Stokes, Smith informed them that the school had been noted for the appointment of an Assistant Teacher as early as practicable, but he added that 'the acute shortage of Teachers at the present time precludes an immediate appointment'. The inquiry about additional accommodation was ignored.

Help arrived sooner than expected. On 24 January 1927 Mrs Mary McIlroy from Moruya took up the post of Assistant Teacher. Now there were two adults and over sixty children operating in the single-roomed building.



ABOVE: Are these Mrs McIlroy's junior classes posing on the verandah? And is this the original classroom? There are forty-two children. By October 1928 Mrs McIlroy had forty-seven children in the second classroom. She may well have taken the photograph. Standing on the right is Ruby Grant who many years later, as Ruby Webberley, wrote '*Granitetown memories*'. The girl standing on the far left may be Ruby's school friend, Evelyn Grant. It is unclear why Ruby and her friend have joined the junior classes for this photo opportunity. They may on occasion have helped Mrs McIlroy as 'auxiliaries'.

RIGHT: A rare photograph showing both classrooms. The second was ready for use on 2 May 1927, seven months after the opening of the first. Amongst the four children seated on the verandah is Randall Irons. His father, Frank Irons, hailed from Edzell in Scotland. The family arrived in Sydney in January 1927 where they lived for around six months before Frank Irons found work as a blacksmith at the quarry.



Both classrooms faced north. One classroom was used for the quarry apprentices' theory classes which were taken by stonemason Harold Haysom. (In 2013 the author saw similar classrooms in the grounds of the Lady Denman Museum near Huskisson.)

Fred Bunker went back on the offensive on 3 February 1927. He wrote to the Minister for Education on the need for additional accommodation. 'To add to our predicament, at the end of this month more children are expected. Six more houses having been erected for their parents' accommodation'. Bunker offered a possible short-term solution. 'So acute do we feel the position we would like to make a suggestion for your consideration. In the event of you being able to deal with the alterations and additional rooms at an early date, we would like to know if you could come to some arrangement with Messrs Dorman Long & Co whereby one of the newly erected cottages could be temporarily used for school purposes'. It is highly probable that Bunker and his colleagues had discussed this idea with John Gilmore, the Quarry Manager. Bunker ended his letter on a desperate note. 'Our anxiety in asking for your earliest consideration is that the children's education is at a standstill'.

The Department approached Dorman Long about the possibility of the temporary use of a vacant cottage but Alfred Martin very quickly quashed the idea. 'Whilst we are extremely anxious to relieve the present congestion at the existing school, we regret that we are unable to accept your suggestion to use one of the recently erected cottages as temporary additional accommodation as these were built for employees we are bringing from England who are due to arrive in Sydney by the *Berrima* on the 28th inst. When these men are installed at the quarry there will be no vacant cottages in the village'.

In fact only four of the six newly erected cottages were required for the Scottish tool smiths and their families who arrived in Sydney on the *Berrima* on 3 March. The other two were allocated to men who had been resident in Granite Town since 1926. At the end of March the *Moruya Examiner* reported that George Urquhart and Derrie Mitchell 'have taken over a home each in contemplation of marital bliss in the near future'.^{viii} Since their brides-to-be would not arrive from Aberdeen until 9 May and since their marital bliss was not planned to begin until June, Dorman Long's Sydney management could have, had it wished, authorised temporary use of a cottage to ease the pressure in the school.

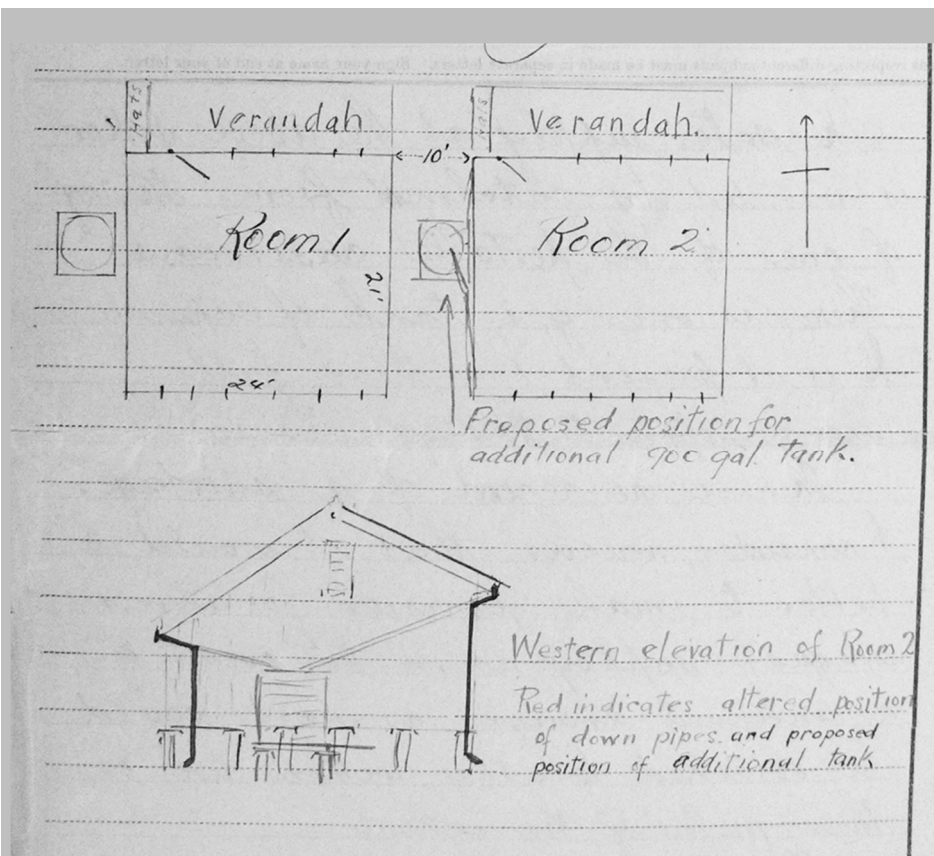
The Department of Education was left with no choice. Since there were no available portable rooms a new unit had to be constructed. The Officer-in-Charge at Drummoyne was asked to treat this as 'a specially urgent case' and on this occasion the carpenters really did pull out all the stops. Less than two months after submission of the order, the *Moruya Examiner* reported the delivery and erection of the additional schoolroom.^{ix} It was ready for use on 2 May 1927 and was 'a replica of the original'.^x

The cost of its manufacture, too, appears to have replicated that of the original. The first classroom cost £315 plus an additional £75 for the supply of three pan closets. A return for the cost of building the school indicated the actual expenditure was £449.8.4. A pencilled explanation indicated that the amount 'includes removal of five large trees and all material had to be hauled up a cliff fifty feet'. The trees might have been removed to prepare an area of

ground next to the school for use as a playground and sports field.^{xi} There was a further charge of £97.13s.8d. for plumbing and painting, £6.2s.9d. for the furniture and £10.15s. for the water tank ordered by John Carter. It is unclear which – if any – of these figures included Dorman Long's freight charges. The original school, then, cost well over £500 to provide. For the second classroom an internal minute indicated that while its construction in Sydney would

cost £280, because of the distance 'a fair estimate for the construction of the building would be £350'. The adoption of West's recommendation of a two-roomed building would surely have saved the Department time and money.

With two teachers and two rooms in place the business of educating the children of Granite Town could proceed in relative comfort.



LEFT: John Farrell's talents extended to rudimentary plumbing. On 8 October 1928 he warned the Chief Inspector that the existing water tank was only one-third full. 'There is no record of a shortage. I consider, however, that it would be better to make provision for a more adequate supply as in the event of a continued drought, no water could be obtained locally within two or three miles of the school'. He recommended fixing a second tank to the western side of the new classroom. 'A stand would need to be provided and fresh elbows fitted to the down pipe to bring them into the tank'. His sketch showed the position of the two classrooms and the positions of the existing tank and a

recommended second tank. An 800 gallon tank was authorised two months later.

ⁱ *Moruya Examiner*, 23 May 1925

ⁱⁱ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 August, 1925

ⁱⁱⁱ *Moruya Examiner*, 3 April 1926

^{iv} Source materials relating to the development and staffing of the school are located in AONSW 5/16124.1: *School files – Granite Town*

^v *Moruya Examiner*, 4 September 1926

^{vi} *Moruya Examiner*, 25 September 1925

^{vii} *Moruya Public School Centenary Book*, 1979, in *Not forgotten: Memorials in granite*, Christine Greig, 1993, p53

^{viii} *Moruya Examiner*, 26 March 1927

^{ix} *Moruya Examiner*, 4 April 1927

^x *Granitetown memories*, Ruby Webberley, 2003, p38

^{xi} *Connected to the Bridge: Albert Ogg's biography*, Sally Cains, 1995, p11

Granite Town Public School 1926-1933 Part 2

by Bill Glennie

‘It was like having a private school with a special teacher all to ourselves’

With two teachers and two rooms in place the business of educating the children of Granite Town could proceed in relative comfort.

There was a surprisingly high turnover of staff – one relieving teacher, three headmasters and at least four assistants – in the school’s short life. In correspondence John Carter referred to himself as ‘teacher’ or ‘teacher-in-charge’, never headmaster. His was certainly the biggest challenge, having to cope on his own with over sixty pupils whose ages ranged from five to fourteen. He did not stay beyond December 1926. He made no impression on Ruby Webberley who had arrived in Granite Town as a nine-year-old in July 1926 and who made frequent references to the school and its staff in her memoir *Granitetown memories*. Ruby identified Francis Squire, Carter’s successor, as the first headmaster of the school.

Squire appears to have been something of an eccentric, too much so for the Granite Town parents. ‘Things hadn’t been going too well and many complaints about his methods were being discussed.

Mr Squire was a man in his fifties, an odd looking character who usually wore a sinister-looking flat bowler hat which to me wasn’t in keeping with my idea of a teacher! What he wore wouldn’t have mattered, but his vile temper when he reprimanded anyone, which he did quite frequently, was frightening. He would have the cane held high above his head waving it about till he brought it down viciously on the victim’s hand. The memory of his hat is so clear I’m almost sure he put it on, on these occasions’.ⁱ According to Ruby Webberley he was replaced following complaints from parents.

Things improved under Andrew McDonald who became headmaster on 1 July 1927. Ruby Webberley appreciated the more relaxed atmosphere of the new regime. ‘He was very pleased with the standard of education we had achieved back home and took a great delight in encouraging us to speak of our school days in Scotland. School life now was so very different. It was like having a private school with a special teacher all to ourselves’.ⁱⁱ But McDonald stayed only a year. In June 1928 the *Examiner* reported his promotion to Inspector of Subsidised Schools. He took with him a travelling rug presented by grateful parents.ⁱⁱⁱ Before leaving he introduced his successor, John Farrell, to the school children.



RIGHT: Mr Farrell, standing at the back, with the senior classes. Ruby Webberley’s daughter who lives in Perth, Scotland, was able to identify her mother in the second row from the front, third from the right. Ruby’s brother, Bill, is standing in the row behind, to the left of Ruby’s head.

He seemed genuinely pleased to be amongst us’, wrote Ruby Webberley of the new headmaster, ‘and as time went on this proved to be so’. Farrell’s enlightened approach to the education of his pupils both motivated and amused them. ‘He had this wonderful repartee with children’, Ruby wrote, ‘but

could also be very strict when the occasion arose. He was a strict disciplinarian as far as our lessons were concerned which pleased the parents, especially mine’. He had to be. At one stage he had almost forty pupils in his classroom and with the mix of ages and abilities Ruby recognised that ‘patience would

have been a top priority in a teacher'.^{iv} It was a heavy workload, the only respite being when Annie Innes took the girls for two short sewing class sessions on the school verandah each week.^v

A monthly magazine arrived from Sydney with a code of work for the teacher to adhere to. 'It was an interesting pamphlet and was, in fact, an insight on how schools were all linked together by these methods. In it was news of other schools and their achievements, sometimes describing their environment which gave us a wonderful glimpse into life in many other parts of Australia. We still had lessons on English history, but mainly our lesson was all about our new adopted country. The trials and tribulations of the early explorers made wonderful reading. Our nature study lesson usually took place outside the school. There were no boundary fences; the bush was literally our playground'.^{vi}

Farrell appreciated that most of his students were not Australian. He immediately endeared himself to his mainly Scottish clientele. He had visited Britain during the Great War, he told them, and had more recently stayed with friends in Aberdeen. 'He encouraged the preservation of our Scottish identity by including many of the old Scottish ballads in our singing lessons. When we were singing in class, mother could, whilst sitting in the verandah, listen to the strains of "Jock of Hazeldene", "Annie Lawrie" and many more, wafting down the hill. She used to say it made her cry hearing the children's voices singing the old Scots songs'.^{vii}

Farrell's source of music was his wind-up gramophone. 'On a chair on the verandah he placed the gramophone, and to the amusement of the boys, instead of the usual fall in then march in line into school, we occasionally, to the tune of a jolly polka, danced our way into class'.^{viii} On one occasion it provided the background music to some intricate but well-rehearsed dancing around a specially erected maypole which parents were invited to view.

Farrell's innovations stretched to sport and exercise. Although he was nearing fifty years of age, Ruby Webberley recalled how once the morning whistle had brought the pupils into line in front of the school, 'our P.T. instruction was given. Following the "Good mornings" he proceeded to guide us through numerous exercises. One good way for getting the blood circulating before lessons commenced!'^{ix} Until his arrival the only competitive game had been cricket. He pleased the girls, wrote Ruby, by introducing basketball and a new form of cricket designed for girls – vigoro – played with paddle-like bats. 'It took no time to form a team vigorously coached by the teacher'. He arranged match games with other schools 'to give us, as he aptly put it,

lessons on how to be good sports. We took ourselves quite seriously when a visiting team arrived. The only fans cheering us on were our school mates and some of our mums'.^x There was press coverage of only one such match: on the same day that the Moruya School cricketers drubbed the Granite Town boys by 65 runs – the Scots have never excelled at cricket – the two schools challenged each other at vigoro. 'Although the game was new to the Granite Town girls they showed up creditably in the match'.^{xi} The reporter from the *Examiner* did not give the score.

Farrell could only take his pupils so far. He approached Ruby's father to recommend that he send his older son, Bill, to college in Sydney but by then the Bridge contract was nearing completion, the quarry's long-term future was in doubt and thoughts were turning to a possible return to Aberdeen. As for Ruby, as she grew older 'my lessons were integrating with Bill and children of his age group more every day'.^{xii} The resourceful Mr Farrell started her on a course of book-keeping and shorthand. "It's a good start for a girl", he used to say. So he started a small class and we had regular sessions on those subjects'.^{xiii}

John Farrell's efforts were appreciated in the community and brought occasional rewards. 'When Mr Farrell found he had to work late after school he would call me aside and say, "Do you think mother could provide me with a snack to tide me over till I get home?" I assured him she would and off I ran down the hill, calling as I got into the house, "Mr Farrell wants his tea!" She smiled saying, "I'll boil him an egg and spread some nice quince jelly on scones". Once ready, I carefully carried the lot back up to the school'.^{xiv}

When two inspectors visited the school Ruby reckoned that they were 'quite impressed with our steady standard'.^{xv} They could not have improved on Ruby's verdict on Granite Town Public School: 'How fortunate we children were with our school, situated where it was and having a teacher with whom we could communicate freely without losing respect for him. Although we were never given the chance of senior schooling, our education was never neglected, in fact, in many ways with the informal rapport between pupil and conscientious teacher we learned many things which helped us to use our own initiative'. She could have added that they were taught to take responsibility. On the few occasions when teachers sought leave of absence due to illness the teacher left in charge was assisted in the supervision of classes by senior monitors. Much of the credit for the school's success during this period must go to the Assistant Teacher, Mary McIlroy. To the young Ruby Webberley she was an

‘an elderly schoolmistress’ – there was some truth in that, for she was sixty-two years old when she took up her post in January 1927. ‘I was very fond of her’, wrote Ruby, ‘and sometimes would visit her during the lunch hour’.^{xvi}

She remembered the strong scent of jonquils perched on the top of a cupboard in Mrs McIlroy’s room. The scent may have been welcomed on hot summer days when forty-seven very young children crowded into her 753 square feet of classroom. Elderly she may have been but she was hardy. When she applied for leave of absence for two days because of a severe cold in July 1929, she reminded the Chief Inspector

to whom she made application that she had only had one day’s leave in the previous twelve months when Mr Farrell sent her home at 9 a.m. on account of the danger of the road to Moruya being flooded.

‘The worth and efficiency of the assistant, Mrs McIlroy’

Mrs McIlroy was attracting the attention of the *Moruya Examiner* long before John Farrell’s arrival. When John Perkins, the Federal Member of Parliament, visited the



ABOVE: Mrs McIlroy, seated on the left, with Granite Town school’s junior classes. The expressions on the children’s faces suggest they took their education very seriously.

quarry on Empire Day 1927 he addressed the assembled school. Mrs McIlroy’s junior pupils entertained him ‘with Empire Day songs and recitations demonstrating the careful training and the interest taken in them by their teacher’.^{xvii} In September of that year she directed the schoolchildren in a ‘Kinder Spiel’ – *Dan the Newsboy* – in the newly opened Recreation Hall, raising over £12 for school funds. She received ‘a handsome gift after the play’.^{xviii} A year later it was the Moruya District Hospital which benefited from a School Hospital Day when pupils and parents combined to entertain and feed all-comers. By then John Farrell was headmaster and stonemason Sam Pringle congratulated him and Mrs McIlroy ‘on their capable direction of the children’.^{xix} A few weeks later following a school concert held in the Recreation Hall Farrell himself publicly ‘paid a high

tribute to the worth and efficiency of the assistant, Mrs McIlroy’.^{xx}

The School Hospital Day was an early example of the bond between community and school becoming stronger after the arrival of John Farrell. Empire Day celebrations became grander affairs, moving on to the stage of the Recreation Hall. In 1929 the school pupils gave lusty renditions of songs suitable for the occasion and Mrs McIlroy was again singled out for training her charges well. But now there were contributions from the Reverend T Gair, the local minister, from Bill Morrison, the masons’ foreman, and from John Farrell himself, and Mr McKenzie sang *The veteran’s song* in good style.^{xxi} Two years later John Farrell delivered an ambitious address on *Steps to World Peace: The Empire and the League of Nations*, his new Assistant Teacher spoke on the *History and significance of the Union Jack*, while

Mrs Topp sang *Hail Caledonia*. The school pupils were on hand to sing several songs including *Flag of Britain*, *The bluebells of Scotland* and *God bless the Prince of Wales*. Having left their audience fired with patriotism and pining for Scottish flora, the pupils enjoyed an afternoon's holiday.

The Farrell-McIlroy partnership ended abruptly when Mrs McIlroy's service was terminated on 27 October 1929 on the eve of her sixty-fifth birthday. She was missed in more ways than one, for Mrs McIlroy had a motor car and every morning was driven to work by her son who waited at the bottom of the hill for anyone who wanted a lift into Moruya. 'This he never failed to do and it was appreciated because Smithy wasn't available on weekday forenoons'.^{xxii} Andrew McDonald and John Farrell were regular passengers on her morning run, returning home on foot or on the workman's bus. After Mrs McIlroy's departure John Farrell had to resort to his bicycle. The inconvenience was eased when the Chief Inspector agreed to his request for the £6 10/- annual bicycle allowance.¹

Mrs McIlroy was not easy to replace. Marjory Egan of Moruya was a stopgap, employed for the thirty-seven days that remained of the 1929 session before her transfer to Moruya Public School. Iaon McEachern who described himself as 'ex-student assistant' was there for most of 1930, although there are two brief references in the school records to a Mr Boyd in January and March. McEachern resigned at the end of the year, pleading for an early payment of salary due to him 'as I intend going into business early in the New Year and the money would be of great assistance to me'. The Granite Town experience had not inspired him to follow a teaching career. McEachern, a resident of Peakhurst in Sydney, may have found the inconvenience of the accommodation – he lodged in the Hotel Adelaide – and the journey to the school too much. He was replaced by Harry Croft who worked with Farrell until the school's closure. Croft was unique. He and his family were allocated a house in Granite Town. Was this belated generosity on the part of Dorman Long? They could hardly do otherwise, for houses were becoming vacant as the closure of the quarry loomed.

'I command that the school be closed'

The writing on the quarry face had been apparent for some time. The last of Dorman Long's three steamers had been sold off in February 1930. The

construction site no longer sourced aggregate for its concrete from Moruya, and the ships of the Illawarra and South Coast Steam Navigation Company were adequate to supply the dwindling demand for dimension stone. In June 1929 John Bradfield, the Chief Engineer, had reported that in the previous twelve months the quarry had been turning out stone faster than it could be placed in position, so much so that its storage became a problem. With stone stockpiled in Sydney and the pylons nearing completion, men were laid off at the quarry. The workforce which had peaked at 240 in 1927-1928 slumped to 168 in the period 1930-1931. The 150 men still engaged in September 1931 were employed in the final stages of dismantling machinery and sheds for their removal to Sydney by steamships of the Illawarra Company.^{xxiii} As cottages became vacant in Granite Town, Dorman Long advertised them for sale at knock-down prices: £30 for a four-roomed cottage, £25 for a three-roomed.^{xxiv}

Inevitably the dwindling workforce had an impact on the school. In April 1931 John Farrell told the Department of Education's visiting day-labour official that there was every prospect of one of the rooms becoming available for transfer – music to a Chief Inspector's ears – but for the moment the school roll, he said, was holding up and justified the retention of two rooms and two teachers. He explained that 'the maintenance of the attendance is due to the fact that, whilst the fathers of the families have left the district in search of work, the families have remained at Granite Town until their future destination is determined. The families may begin to move at any time'.

And move they did. On 2 October 1931 John Farrell notified the District Inspector that the effective enrolment had fallen to thirty-seven. By the end of the month the figure was nine. On 6 November Farrell notified the Chief Inspector that there were five children attending the school, and 'during the week a family will be leaving and there will be only two children, who may attend Newstead School by crossing the river'. On 14 November – exactly two months before the last piece of Moruya granite was set in place at Milsons Point – Inspector Harrold with a military flourish decreed: 'I command that the school be closed and that Mr Croft be transferred'. One classroom was dispatched to Bega; Mr Croft set off for Nowra; John Farrell was sent to Moruya; the fate of the second classroom is unrecorded but it was gone by the end of February 1932, and on 4 April Dorman Long & Co agreed to the Department of

¹ When Andrew McDonald submitted his first claim for a travel allowance he omitted to inform the District Inspector that he enjoyed a lift to work on Mrs McIlroy's car each morning. Mrs McIlroy was already claiming for travel. The Chief Inspector of Primary Schools got wind

of this. There followed some blunt questioning regarding Mr McDonald's claim for 7/- per week. His allowance was subsequently reduced to 4/- per week, the weekly fare on the workman's bus that ran from the quarry to Moruya every workday afternoon.

Education's request to terminate the peppercorn lease. The closure of the school had been more effortless than its appearance.

Granite Town was a unique tightly-knit community. It existed for a purpose, and its character was very much shaped by the presence of its Scottish families, most of whom came from a narrow corridor that stretched twelve miles north-west from the city of Aberdeen along the River Don through Bucksburn, Dyce, and Kintore towards Kemnay and Inverurie. Many of the quarrymen and masons knew each other before they left Aberdeenshire or forged friendships on the six-week voyage to New South Wales. Once in Granite Town there was no question of assimilating with the locals. The evidence suggests it worked the other way round. Bob Colefax wrote of the impenetrable dialect of the north-east of Scotland: 'Most of us managed to attune our ears to this variation of the English language, in fact we grew to like it, and some of us even essayed to speak it'.^{xxv} Their distinctive culture found expression in social gatherings in the Recreation Hall provided by Dorman Long. In the school both Andrew McDonald and John Farrell respected the Scottish background of the majority of their pupils. Ruby Webberley recalled that when the two inspectors left after visiting the school, 'We sang for them the Scottish songs Mr Farrell had taught us'.

Like all communities the Scots valued the education of their children. On many occasions the community and school worked together in the interests of the Granite Town children. When the annual school concert was held in December 1930 to raise funds to provide each child with a book, John Gilmore took to the stage to present John Farrell and his assistant with gifts on behalf of appreciative parents and the *Moruya Examiner* paid tribute to 'our worthy Australian Scots' for maintaining the standards reached on previous occasions.^{xxvi}

One such occasion took place on the evening of Thursday 6 December 1928 in the Recreation Hall. The *Moruya Examiner* did not record how many crowded into the Hall that night, but a few months earlier an audience of 200 attended a concert given by the Granite Town Boy Scouts in the Mechanics' Hall in Moruya. That figure was surely surpassed in the Recreation Hall. The concert was on home ground, its purpose was to raise money for school equipment, and John Farrell and Mary McIlroy had found a role for every one of the school's eighty-five pupils, so a good turnout was assured.

Mrs McIlroy's junior classes were to the fore. The Babies' Class performed Children's Dance Games; Jimmy Feggans sang *Little boy blue* while Wee Robb, the blacksmith's son, delivered a recitation, *I come from Scotland*; the Second Class girls acted out a

play, *Two little kittens*, and their dancing was singled out for praise in the local newspaper: 'The streamer dance was very pretty and though the movements were very intricate they were gracefully and accurately performed'. The seniors contributed a fairy play, *Snow White and the Dwarfs*, the number of dwarfs not being specified, and a burlesque, *The cinemaniac*. The senior chorus performed an Aberdeenshire song, *The standard on the Braes of Mar*.

It was a colourful evening. The older pupils had helped prepare the stage properties and no doubt parents contributed to the costuming: 'The dressing for the parts was very beautiful: the picturesque national costume of Scotland made a rich colour while glittering winged fairies, kings and queens in royal robes, cowboy, Indian, the villain and his wicked wife, the infant prodigy, soldiers, dwarfs, a real prince - all the picturesque people of the stage walked on and spoke their pieces at Granite Town'.

It was typical of the community that others contributed to the occasion. Mrs Smith's dancers performed reels, Highland flings, a sword dance, and cow girl and skirt dances. The two '*tiny tots*', Mary Jeffrey and Bunty McNab, received gifts of chocolates from a visiting Santa Claus in appreciation of their Highland Fling. Mrs Haysom and Mrs Bunker provided musical accompaniment. The boys' physical culture squad, trained by Arthur Gerrard, gave a rhythmic display to music supplied by Jimmy Milne's violin. At the end of the concert and before the hall was readied for the dance that followed, John Farrell went on stage to pay tribute to the pupils and to his assistant, Mrs McIlroy. 'He also expressed himself as very pleased with the encouragement and appreciation extended to him by every resident during his five months labour with the children'. On a night such as this few in the audience would have given much thought to what the future held for Granite Town and its school.

In many ways it was an idyllic life for a young lad'



At 93 Alastair Gerrard may well be Granite Town's oldest surviving resident. It was his father, Arthur Gerrard, who wrote to the Minister for Education in 1926 urging him to provide a school in Granite Town.

Alastair lives with his wife, Jeanne, in Westmead, Sydney

His memories of the school are hazy. He remembers crossing the creek to reach the school on the hillside and recalls the names of his two teachers, Mrs McIlroy and Mr Farrell. It was Mrs McIlroy 'who drummed into my head "Never finish a sentence with a preposition". I never forgot that even though I left school at 14'. He didn't recognise anyone in the school photographs, not even himself or his sister, except Billy Mison whose family lived in a tent beyond the village: 'They seemed to be a fairly big family'. He recalls being outfitted as a pirate at one of the school concerts held in the Recreation Hall, and remembers, too, pulling Isabel Benzie's pigtail into his inkwell. Why? She had pulled a face at him. When Bill Benzie called round at the Gerrard house that evening seeking redress for his daughter's inked pigtail Alastair remembers he was given short shrift by his father.

Perhaps not surprisingly it was life outside the school he remembers best: the hooting of the ships' horns as they arrived at dusk to pick up dimension stone and granite aggregate for the Bridge site in Sydney, lights ablaze – 'a sight to behold as a child'; the picture shows held in the open before the construction of the Recreation Hall, featuring Tex Maynard, Buck Jones, Tom Mix and his horse Tony – 'The next day we would be in the paddocks emulating each of these heroes. What more could a young boy ask! It was

always a fight to see who was the horse and who was the cowboy'; going to the river to catch sprats in a bottle for bait and then off to the old wooden rickety Malabar bridge to fish; making sailing boats out of kerosene tins to float in the shallows; the hen bought for Xmas lunch but which was spared and enjoyed 'a long and happy life under the house' as a pet; the weekly visits of George Chewyng with his horse and cart to sell vegetables to the village residents; sitting around the hurricane lamp in the dark of the cottage flicking through the latest Hordern Brothers catalogue; setting off with a hurricane lamp to the Recreation Hall with a message for his father who was inside enjoying a concert or dance, 'Would you tell Mr Gerrard, Tom's crying' – Tom was the baby of the family; and the Italians – he called them 'spags', short for spaghetti – playing their favourite game, botchy: 'The mix of Scottish and Italian nationalities was such a good combination that we never knew the difference and we would attend Italian celebrations and took all this as a matter of normal life'.

Alastair helped clear up one point. In the list of Granite Town employees held at the Museum there are two Gerrards listed as masons: Arthur and William. Yet only one Gerrard is listed in the registers of the stonemasons' trade union: William. Arthur and William are one and the same person. Alistair's father was commonly known as 'Duckbill' or Bill for short. Why? Alastair has no idea.

ⁱ *Granitetown memories*, Ruby Webberley, 2003, p27

ⁱⁱ *Granitetown memories*, Ruby Webberley, 2003, p27

ⁱⁱⁱ *Moruya Examiner*, 30 June 1928

^{iv} *Granitetown memories*, Ruby Webberley, 2003, p27

^v *Granitetown memories*, Ruby Webberley, 2003, p53

^{vi} *Granitetown memories*, Ruby Webberley, 2003, p32

^{vii} *Granitetown memories*, Ruby Webberley, 2003, p44

^{viii} *Granitetown memories*, Ruby Webberley, 2003, p44

^{ix} *Granitetown memories*, Ruby Webberley, 2003, p56

^x *Granitetown memories*, Ruby Webberley, 2003, p56

^{xi} *Moruya Examiner*, 11 October 1930

^{xii} *Granitetown memories*, Ruby Webberley, 2003, p68

^{xiii} *Granitetown memories*, Ruby Webberley, 2003, p68

^{xiv} *Granitetown memories*, Ruby Webberley, 2003, p49

^{xv} *Granitetown memories*, Ruby Webberley, 2003, p49

^{xvi} *Granitetown memories*, Ruby Webberley, 2003, p38

^{xvii} *Moruya Examiner*, 28 May 1927

^{xviii} *Moruya Examiner*, 1 October 1927

^{xix} *Moruya Examiner*, 22 September 1928

^{xx} *Moruya Examiner*, 15 December 1928

^{xxi} *Moruya Examiner*, 8 June 1929

^{xxii} *Granitetown memories*, Ruby Webberley, 2003, p38

^{xxiii} *Moruya Examiner*, 12 September, 1931; 24 October 1931; *The Hospitals Bridge Book*, 1932

^{xxiv} *Moruya Examiner*, 12 September, 1931; 8 August 1931

^{xxv} *Moruya's golden years* A V (Bob) Colefax, 1997, p16

^{xxvi} *Moruya Examiner*, 20 December 1930