

JAMES BARKER: FOUNDATION HEADMASTER, 1956 - 1960



Mr James A. Barker was the foundation headmaster appointed to St Albans High School. He was a qualified science teacher, which was a bonus for the school, as there was a shortage of science teachers in the state at the time. Barker had come from the staff of Warragul High School, so the promotion to St Albans was his first appointment as a headmaster. Staff report that he was a very friendly and capable headmaster who supported them through the uncertainties of the first years. Even the original students speak of him with fondness and affection, but there also seems to have been a good rapport between most of the teachers and students in these inaugural years.

Mr Barker was from Moonambel (near Avoca) and his wife Bernice was from Bruthen. After the Barkers completed their teaching careers they returned to country Victoria for their retirement. Mr Barker has passed away, so it was not possible to

interview him for this golden jubilee publication, but his insight into the progress of the school between 1956 and 1960, after which he left, can be seen in his contributions to the school magazines and a final report, as included below:

1956: Foundation in Sunshine

In attempting this small magazine we are in no way aiming at the generally accepted school magazine, consisting largely of contributions from the students. In a school composed entirely of First Formers, located in a kind of limbo, we hesitate to attempt too much. However, to do nothing at all would leave our very existence during 1956 to become just "empty breath and rumours of a doubt," and deprive many of our pupils who have had only one year at High School, of records and memories which they may treasure.

Staff members have therefore compiled this necessarily brief record of school activities. Though "work" has not been mentioned, we can assure our readers that it has not been neglected - in fact we have had the same experience as other new schools, and feel that our present pupils are actually in advance of first form pupils in some large schools where they are "less than the dust."



Mr Barker and Mr R Crick M.L.A. presenting awards to students, 1956.

The essentials of school life can be carried on regardless of handicaps when students, teachers and parents cooperate cheerfully as they have done during the past year. We have been fortunate in having good playing facilities and attractive garden surroundings and we are grateful for being granted their unrestricted use. The fact remains, however, that we are now all counting the days until we move into our new school. When we first assembled, we felt ourselves to be a collection of "27 varieties", but all that is past. Our present pupils will provide a closely knit and happy "top" and we have confidence in them.

1957: Relocation to St Albans

A school magazine, looking back as it does over a year's happenings, is a kind of panorama of the school year from the students' point of view. In after years may its pages be a source of happy recollections when school mates meet, and may be carried through the years just for the memories conjured up by its cover. I think that most children are nowadays happy in their school life which it is the duty and the wish of all teachers to make full and well rounded, so that students will go out into the world, not only qualified for their particular profession, but well informed on matters of public interest and fitted to cooperate happily with their fellow men.

However, these aims cannot be accomplished unless the student has the desire to prepare herself or himself for citizenship. The years from 14-17 are years of great change in most young people. How often may we hear a teacher say as he adds a boy's or girl's name to the list of Leaving or Matriculation Certificates, "Do you remember what so and so was like in Form II?" and they would not be referring to examination marks. Yet so many students go out into the world at this raw, immature stage with all their hidden possibilities underdeveloped because they will at once consider themselves as adults and be treated as adults. One of our leading "dailies" has chosen this early leaving age as the most necessary theme for Speech Nights. "The illusory benefits and the ultimate loss are often beyond the understanding of the young ... The more that young people accept the discipline and the training of further education the fewer the regrets there will be, and the greater will be the country's gain." To put it in simpler terms, help your school to help you.

1958: Official Opening by Minister



The Minister for Education, Mr Bloomfield, at official opening of the school, 1958.

As I glance back over the previous two years of our magazine I realise, although each year we have broken new ground, and can no longer think of our school as "new", the fact remains that even in 1958 we have not had a "normal" year - that is a normal high school year such as most of the staff have been accustomed to in other schools. We are still doing things for the first time - whether it is taking part in inter-school athletics or gaining Proficiency Certificates or planting a tree. This year we received into our immature fold about 200 first formers, and next year with about 70 of our originals left to form an Intermediate class, we are to receive 260 more first formers. A school of 560 of whom

some 440 are in the two lowest forms poses special problems and difficulties which call for tremendous efforts from staff, pupils and parents alike. Such a distribution was unheard of not so long ago, before the "creation" of new schools, and, until a school like ours reaches a state of balance, we cannot expect to have a "normal" year.

We do feel, however, that our present students, by their cooperation and general behaviour, are laying a foundation and setting up a tradition which will hasten the day of our "completion" as a school. It is especially gratifying that 70 of our original 120 pupils will be returning next year and it augurs well for the future of the school, that so many parents are availing themselves of the educational opportunity provided by a well equipped school in their midst.



Sometimes assumed to be the first assembly at St Albans in 1957, this photo is from 1958.

1959: Consolidation of Teaching

As 1959, the fourth year of the school's existence, draws to its close with an attendance of 550 and a prospective enrollment of 750 for 1960, we feel that our foundation period has ended. The magazine you are about to read shows that the school has reached maturity. This is our first "printed" magazine, though doubtless all our original pupils will remember with affection, their first year in temporary quarters and their first little magazine.

In the same way the school itself is now changing from a small and friendly community to a large, but we hope, not impersonal one. At the end of this year the first sizeable group of ex-students will take up careers for which their four years at school have prepared them. We wish them well. At the same time it is pleasing that so many of our original students have either completed their four years or intend to return for the fifth year.



Mr Barker and St Albans High teachers, 1959.

If this appreciation of the educational opportunities provided by a modern High School continues, and we are sure it will, a big responsibility falls on the school to see that it becomes a place which will not only give happiness and benefit to its pupils, but will also make them public spirited, energetic and upright citizens. The only way in which this can be achieved is by training students at home and at school to be trustworthy and responsible so that good behaviour and good manners will be something every child can voluntarily contribute towards the well-being of the school community. Not every student can excel in examinations or win races. It is the great majority who cannot do either of these things who will make the school by being honest, straightforward and unselfish.

In a more tangible and obvious way we hope that our school will soon become an important part of the St. Albans scene. Ours is a "new" and even unique suburb in which people of varied, perhaps antagonistic backgrounds, have settled down to make new homes and new lives together. Their efforts do them credit. We hope to make our school and its surroundings a place residents may be proud of. When an ex-students' association is formed the school should be more closely linked with the district it has been established to serve. One of the aims of modern education is for the parents and teachers to cooperate so that each child may be understood and helped as an individual. At present, owing to the difficulty of making contact with the parents, we are not able to do this in most cases but we would welcome the interest of every parent.

Our school motto serves its purpose if it helps the student to realise that his guiding light, which will keep him "straight" in both his thoughts and his actions, is in fact "truth", that is, what his conscience tells him is right. The school will have cause to be proud if its students can keep this ideal before them.

1960: Contemplating the Need for Education

We read frequently of the rapid changes which are taking place in the world of today. If we think for a moment, we realise that these great advances have come from an expanding education and a great desire for knowledge. In the light of this new emphasis on advanced education we should consider our own high schools and what they have to offer pupils.

The trend is and must continue to be towards higher qualifications for pupils who are leaving school. Practically all pupils have the opportunity of a secondary education in which they may proceed to Matriculation should they so desire. It is most important that our boys and girl develop this desire to achieve the highest possible certificate issued by the school. It is evident that more and more are remaining at school beyond the statutory leaving age of fourteen years. That this is necessary is shown by the higher qualifications asked for by employers in industry, commerce and the professions. As an example of this demand for higher initial qualifications, girls who wish to become nurses are expected to commence training with at least Leaving Certificate. It is quite common for students to return to school even at the age of twenty-one or over, when older and wiser, they discover they need a particular qualification, and how hard it is to pick up the threads

The extra time spent at school gaining the required qualifications brings the student to a more stable and mature outlook on life, with a greater sense of responsibility so that he can at once begin to advance in his chosen career. This aspect is too often overlooked, but any school can point to many such among their senior pupils who "will never look back" once their careers begin. Of course, this extra time, though it should not be so regarded, imposes a strain on the parents financially and there is an obligation on students who are benefiting from their parents' efforts not to hanker after the pastimes and pleasures of their contemporaries who are out earning Failure to realise that one cannot have one's cake and eat it leads to discontent, and often failure in the examinations which the student has been kept at school to pass.

Parents who assume, and let their children assume all through their primary school days, that the children will automatically leave at fourteen are inducing state of mind in which the child gets practically no benefit from his time at high school. It would be helpful if parents would decide that the child will go as far as he is able, and how far that is likely to be is impossible for anybody to predict at the age of twelve or even fourteen. After all, a fine building has been provided on your very doorstep. It is up to St. Albans parents and students to help make it a fine school producing fine citizens.

1960: Final Report

I have much pleasure in submitting a report for 1960, the fifth year of the school's existence.

Enrollment

The enrollment increased by approximately 200 pupils over that of 1959, the enrollment at the beginning of the year being 743. The school consists of 19 forms divided as follows:- 1 Form V, 2 Forms IV, 4 Forms III, 7 Forms II, 5 Forms I. It appears that a large senior school will develop rapidly with so many pupils in junior forms. This will be further accentuated by the pleasing feature noted in recent years of boys and girls staying on to at least the Intermediate year.

Accommodation

The completion of stage 3 during the year has relieved the strain of finding sufficient class rooms, and ample accommodation will be available for 1961. In the new section occupied during the year there are - Music Room; Commercial Room; 2 Art rooms; a Woodwork room; a Sheetmetal room as well as 5 general class rooms. Metalwork has not been taught as yet but it will be included in the curriculum for 1961. Furniture and equipment has been supplied by the Education Department for all rooms except the metalwork room. Equipment for the latter room is arriving and it is expected that it will be complete by the beginning of the new school year.

Grounds

During the year the Public Works Department sealed areas adjacent to the recently constructed buildings. The garden has continued to flourish and is a credit to the gardener. His thoroughness, hard work and enthusiasm never falter and the results of his labours are enjoyed by all associated with the school.

Tuck-Shop

The tuckshop, completed at the end of January, commenced business on the first day of the school year. It has functioned very smoothly thanks to an efficient manageress and the hard work of a number of parents who have been untiring in their efforts throughout the year.

Courses of Study

These, in general, follow the usual pattern for a High School. A common course of subjects exists for Forms I and II except that an alternative language, either French or German, can be taken. Specialisation commences at the Form III level, pupils being able to follow either the Professional or Commercial course. The latter course is very popular with the girls who wish to become secretaries or office assistants but full use of the course is obtained only if parents realise that two years are necessary. With the successful completion of the Intermediate Certificate opportunities exist for excellent positions in the Clerical field. At the Leaving Certificate level further specialisation is available with courses in Science and Mathematics or the Humanities. With increasing numbers a Commercial Course will be available and next year Commercial Principles and Practice will be taught at this level.

Examination Results

At the end of 1959, 64 pupils presented for Intermediate Certificate - Results were well up to expectations when it is considered that all pupils in Form IV presented for every subject studied. 23 Intermediate Certificates were gained while 22 others passed in 4 or more subjects thus enabling them to proceed to do Leaving Certificate if so desired. 7 of these pupils have since completed the Intermediate Certificate.

The University this year has made the school Class A for the Intermediate Certificate. This means the school is able to carry out its own examinations at the Form IV level and this is a great benefit to pupils. Of the 45 pupils examined last month 35 gained the certificate and 6 others passed in 4 or more subjects. These results were excellent and reflect credit not only on the pupils but also on a very good staff of teachers.

The Class A system imposes a very heavy burden of work on teachers at a time when they are most tired - a period which is greeted with relief when the students are examined by the University. This is voluntary and some schools do not seek the internal system because of the huge extra amount of organisation, typing, supervision and corrections required. The school has been made an examination centre for Leaving Certificate examinations - a great help to both students and parents.

Scholarships

Last December 6 Junior Scholarships and 5 Free Places were awarded by the Education Department. These are awarded by the Department after considering the marks gained by pupils of Form II or higher forms at the half-yearly examinations in the school. Pupils must be under 14½ years of age at the end of the particular year when the scholarship is granted. In all 20 holders of these scholarships have been in attendance at the school. As well 3 holders of the very valuable Albion Quarries Scholarship attend the school.

School Improvements

During the year several additions have been made to equipment and furnishings. An electric duplicator has been purchased at a cost of £211, a motor mower for £63 and a record player for £23. Curtains for the offices, a carpet for the Senior Mistress' office and a number of mirrors for the corridors in the girls' section at a total cost of approximately £50. Subsidy from the Education

Department on a £2 for £1 basis has been granted towards the cost of £150 worth of garden seats and also blackout fittings for the projection room to cost £120.

Social Service

A strong feature of the other than class activities is the social service work, teaching pupils to share their privileges with others in needy circumstances - and take an active part in affairs of civic interest. During the year valuable contributions have been made to Footscray Hospital through an egg collection and also to Legacy by collection of out-of-date telephone directories. In addition financial assistance has been given to the Children's Hospital £53, World Refugee Year £37, R.S.S.A.I.L. of Aust. £229, and the Deaf and Dumb Institute £2.

Sport

This has followed its usual course throughout the year and the active participation in the various games has helped to build up the good school spirit that prevails. Inter-school matches have been held at regular intervals with neighboring High Schools and as well two important visits need special mention. The first was the visit from Drouin High School, the pupils from this school being entertained as well as taking part in various matches. On the other occasion our school visited Bacchus Marsh High School where the hospitality was on a generous scale.

Excursions and Other Activities

A very important part of school life is the training of pupils in how to conduct themselves when at public functions, travelling by train or tram and visiting factories and institutions. During the year various excursions have been made to factories, the Art Gallery, Melbourne Town Hall for Symphony Concerts.

Staff

During the year there have been four staff changes. A well balanced and capable staff meant much to the efficient running of the school.

In conclusion I wish to thank staff members for the loyal cooperation during the year. The school has been fortunate in having Miss E. Taylor as Senior Mistress and Mr. G. Strauss as Senior Master and I would like to thank them in particular for their untiring, and efficient work. I also wish to express appreciation to all connected with the school and in particular to the members of the Advisory Council who by their interest and advice have helped to make another successful school year and also to the members of the Parents and Friends Association for their cooperation and help.



James A. Barker

After St Albans

After leaving St Albans at the end of 1961, James Barker was appointed to Strathmore High School and was the Principal there from 1961 to 1971. Significant additions to the site occurred during this decade:

- In 1964 the in-ground heated pool was built with the support of the Cooperative Society.
- In 1965 the Commonwealth Government funded construction of a science block.
- In 1971 the assembly hall was built.

Late in 1967 the Board of Inspectors of Secondary Schools visited Strathmore High School and reported that:

"The Headmaster, over some years now, has conducted this school with commendable care and has maintained a strong interest in the wellbeing of his pupils in all spheres of the school's activities. His staff have given him admirable support and many have, indeed, been more than generous with their time in forwarding a number of valuable activities which contribute towards a full school life. Many too exercised a marked influence in the school in the development of good attitudes and spirit.

Mr Barker's final remarks in his 1971 report to the school was: "As my retirement approaches after 11 years at Strathmore I take the opportunity of expressing my appreciation to all who have worked with me during this time. It has been a happy experience for me. I feel a great deal has been accomplished but the school is still developing and I wish it further advancement and every success in the future."



Mr Barker and teaching staff at Strathmore High School, 1960s.

Mr & Mrs Barker in the 1980s



Bernice and James Barker (front row) with Bruce Alcorn, Doc Walsh and former students, 25th anniversary, 1981.



Bernice and James Barker in the 1980s.