

## MARY BURDEN: MATHEMATICS TEACHER, 1960-1969



Mary Josephine Cassar was born in 1916 and was of Maltese heritage. She married an English man, William Thomas Burden, in the early 1940s.

William Thomas Burden was born in 1921 in Lambeth Surrey, England, to James Frederick John Burden and Mary Ann M Wisdom. William was one of seven children. He became an electrician and in 1946 at age 24 he emigrated to Malta. He married Mary Josephine Cassar and they raised four children between 1943 and 1952: Yvonne (1953), Robert (1947), John (1945) and Grace 1952).

The family emigrated to Australia in October 1957 and William found employment as an electrician. They initially stayed in Grant Street, St Albans, possibly with the Camilleri family, before moving to their own place in McIvor Avenue, St Albans.



The Maltese community has had a long history of settlement in St Albans, with some of the earliest documented history being after the First World War. The late Mary Smith remembered the Farrugia family as being the first-known Maltese migrants to come here in 1926 and their children started school in 1931: “The headmaster at the school was Mr Sheridan at first and Mr Cunningham in my time. When he introduced the Farrugia children he said they would find it hard to understand us because they spoke a different language.”

In 1901 there were 268 Maltese in Australia, and in 1947 the total was 3,238 or 0.04% of the total population. The Maltese Assisted Migration Agreement was arranged in 1948, and by 1952 a total of 12,229 people had arrived in Australia under this scheme. There had been an agreement with the British government who were closing down their naval bases in Malta and assisting the retrenched people to migrate.

Mary Burden started working as a mathematics teacher at St Albans High School in 1960; her qualification was listed as Senior Oxford Certificate. In 1962 her extra curricula duty was that she was Form Mistress for Form 2A: “... it’s not a happy form but we have had a happy time with our teachers. Mrs Burden is our form teacher as well as our mathematics teacher and is very and understanding to all of us.”

The Burden family didn’t stay in St Albans very long. By 1963 they had settled into Eastcote Street in Sunshine and Mary took the train to St Albans during the week. Jan Tully would share the carriage occasionally: "I remember her SO well. Sometimes I would travel with her on the train to Sunshine. She was so friendly to we students.”

Barry Rayner was teaching at the High School in the 1960s and recalls that there were several migrant teachers who did a wonderful job in maths-sciences, in particular Mrs Burden, Mrs Kriksciunas, Nick Bolvari, and Paul Pavlov.

Ludmila Pavlova remembered Burden as "another very fine person."

Joe Ribarow remembers Mrs Burden as one of the teachers with a gentle disposition who "At one time spoke to me after class about the problem with some of the other boys who probably didn't change their socks often enough. She was being very gentle and discreet. I thought it was very nice of her to be worrying about the other boys (I was terribly naïve) but was relieved that I didn't have to explain to her that I only had one school outfit myself and that the washing was only done once a week. Why would you need to change your socks more than once a week anyway?"

Mary Burden continued working at St Albans High School until the late 1960s but it is not known where she transferred to after this.

William Thomas Buren died at age 73 years in 1995 and was buried at the Port Arlington Cemetery, Greater Geelong, Victoria.

Mary Josephine Burden nee Cassar died at age 86 years in 2002 Walgett, New South Wales, and was buried at the Port Arlington Cemetery, Greater Geelong, Victoria.



Staff 1962. Mrs Burden in front row second from right.

---

Article written by Joseph Ribarow.

Photograph reproduction by Nick Szwed.