

ADAIR BUNNETT: HISTORY TEACHER, 1970s



Adair Brice Bunnet nee Taylor started at St Albans High School in 1970 with a Bachelor of Arts (1960) and a Diploma of Education (1970) as her teaching credentials. She was a graduate of Monash University's Faculty of Arts and was part of the "radical student movement" of the late 1960s and 1970s; she described her time at university as challenging and exciting.

It certainly was an exciting time in St Albans as the community was grappling with significant change. In 1950, St Albans was a small village with a population of 850 residents with one school and eight shops. When the post-WW2 migrants starting settling in, the neighbourhood soon grew to 7,000 people and 78 shops (1960) and by 1970 the population had reached 20,000. Anti-war and anti-conscription debates that started in classrooms spilled onto streets with new agency as the voting age was reduced. Teenagers were obtaining university degrees and becoming involved in community action and political renewal.



St Albans students at Vietnam moratorium rally 1969. Photo by Max Costa.

When Professor Lancaster-Jones conducted his 'Social Survey' of Melbourne in the late 1960s, it was rather a shock for St Albans residents to receive the wooden spoon. A local perception was that the predominantly migrant population in the working-class neighbourhood at the end of the railway line was being judged as antithetical to social progress and cohesion. This survey had widespread publicity and put St Albans on the map and local police news was quoted unfavourably and often unjustly. Mrs Bunnett penned a strong rebuttal of the Professor's methodology and conclusions, which appeared in the 1971 school magazine (see below).

Adair Brice Taylor married Christopher Lindsay Bunnet, possibly in the late 1960s, and in the early 1970s they were living in South Melbourne. Christopher studied law and eventually established his own business as Christopher Bunnet Lawyers of Collins Street, Melbourne. (His parents came from Numurkah, Victoria.)

Adair's father was Fred Taylor, and though their family history has not been traced a brief article about them has been published for receiving his B.A. Degree from Monash University in 1990 at



age 68. (Monash Reporter Vol. 27, No. 229, June 1990)

Adair Bunnett was a history teacher at St Albans High School - unfortunately the available school magazines do not indicate how long she stayed. History became a life-long passion for her and she continued these interests well after retirement. In the 2008 Queen's Birthday Honours (Australia) awards, Adair received the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for "service to the community, particularly through the preservation and promotion of local history and as a proponent of responsible urban development." She has written a series of books about early Melbourne settlement.

Newspaper Responsibility

Are they accurate?

Earlier in this magazine you have read about the findings of a sociologist. Perhaps you would like to know more about this survey.

In 1967, the newspapers in Melbourne printed the results of some research in the social standing of the suburbs of Melbourne. They reported that St. Albans was ranked 133 out of a possible 133. Toorak was ranked 001 on the same scale. The newspaper reports were based on a piece of research entitled, "A Social Ranking of Melbourne Suburbs" by F. Lancaster-Jones. The article was originally published in the Australia and New Zealand Journal of Sociology, 1967.

In this article I propose to criticise the Lancaster-Jones' survey in a strictly objective manner. Hopefully, the criticism will destroy the low self image of St. Albans, held by many at this school; at least it should cast doubts on the survey.

The Lancaster-Jones survey was compiled from 1961 census data. This, in itself leads to two serious problems. Firstly, the work is hopelessly out of date. Serious researchers find out their own information now, rather than rely on this survey. Just consider the growth of St. Albans in the last 2-3 years, then you will realise the tremendous changes which would have taken place since 1961. How many of your parents lived here then? Clearly, the survey's results are open to question, simply because they are outdated.

A second serious problem also results from the use of census data. You probably saw the last census form. To me it was surprisingly uninteresting, and difficult to fill in, for all the promises that it would be the most detailed and easiest form yet. Imagine what the earlier ones must have been like. There are two groups of problems surrounding census data. The first is that it does not give enough detail as to the social standing of an individual. Information like income, level of education, style of house, manner of living, is essential to any understanding of a social pattern. The two most important details necessary are just not on the census form, i.e., income and style of living. Thus, census data does not provide adequate information for any accurate social ranking.

The second serious problem with census data, is specific to St. Albans. I had enough difficulty working out what information was required. I can easily imagine non-English speakers being confused if native English speakers have difficulty. Children would just not be able to be as accurate as their parents, because of this lack of an adequate vocabulary.

The only way that problems like this can be overcome is through direct interviewing. This is costly and time consuming, but it does provide enough accurate information.

Lancaster-Jones summed up the problems of his survey best when he wrote, "additional information on occupation, income and educational levels would have been desirable." I would suggest that instead of the word "desirable" a more appropriate word would be "necessary" if he was to provide us with adequate information to rate social status.

A logical error was committed by the researcher when he assumed that whole areas would be ranked. He used census districts for ranking, which is to say the least, rather arbitrary. For example, parts of Toorak are rather run down, especially near the railway station, yet these "black spots" are not accounted for in the survey. It assumes all areas are completely the same all through and this is patently absurd.

My conclusions after reading the original survey, were that newspaper reporters were totally irresponsible in their treatment of the survey. They just took the results, without any consideration of the defects. The information was meant for scholars and publication of daily newspapers seriously affected attitudes in areas like St. Albans. This was unnecessary because the severe defects of the survey should have been made more clear.

My second conclusion was that certain changes over the past 10 years would certainly raise St. Albans' ranking even using some of the methods used by Lancaster-Jones.

In other words St. Albans' people have been downgrading themselves needlessly, and to their own detriment.

Mrs A. Bunnett, Alba 1971.



St Albans High School teaching staff 1970.

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