

Rev Ewen McLean
Speech to pre 1930s Reunion Group in 1988.

For the last three weeks I have had the pleasure of supervising the H.S.C examinations. As the students have been working most assiduously, I have also been jotting down a few things that came to my mind in the 1930's. I have a very long list but you will be glad to know I have culled it very severely and I will only mention two or three things from it.

The first thing I think, was the contrast between this year when the students worked in a very comfortable room with carpet on the floor, good light, pleasant surroundings, and those conditions in which we had to sit for our matriculation and leaving, or leaving honours, back in the days that you will remember. Remember we had to walk to the Drill Hall or the St. Mary's Hall - great barns of buildings; conditions -often very hot and very unpleasant. I don't know that the papers then were as hard as they are today. I could hardly read the papers this year, but certainly the conditions now for the children, I'm glad to say, are very much better than those we had to put up with in our time.

My first memory of the Geelong College is the 1929 Speech Day. I had an older brother at school and I came over from Bacchus Marsh for Speech Day. It was being held in the Plaza theatre. I sat upstairs and was entranced by the singing. Taught by Will Samson and Ray Dickson the boys started by singing, 'My mother told me that she would buy me a rubber dolly for me to play with' and then they went on to a more masculine song of 'Keep right on to the end of the road', Harry Lauder's favourite. Then the staff came in -the academic procession with enormous dignity and the school started to sing what I imagined was a school song, 'We're miserable, so miserable down on misery farm. So are the animals, so are the vegetables, down on misery farm', and I thought that could hardly be the school song. Later on I was to learn of course that was not the school song which Ken McIntyre had written.

Music of that time is in my mind. Those of us who were boarders will remember that the more affluent members often owned Decca portable gramophones, often with three or four records which were played over and over and over again; such things as the 'Stein Song', 'I get the Blues when it rains', and one particularly popular one was the song 'Betty Co-Ed'. Do you remember? 'She had eyes of blue for Grammar, lips of red for Scotch, golden head for Wesley, red and black for Xavier is top notch'. What part of her anatomy was for Geelong Grammar I can't remember but we were very grateful that 'her heart's for Geelong College it is said'. That was played over and over again in the dormitories. Some times on Sunday afternoons we would lie out on the lawns and the same gramophone would play there. I think on two occasions I remember being allowed to come and sit on our rugs on the lawn in the Head's garden, because the Head's garden in those days was sacred. But on very hot Sundays, twice I remember being allowed to sit there. I remember one Sunday afternoon an aeroplane flew overhead - it was Kingsford-Smith's Southern Cross. Do you remember some of us getting a half holiday to go out to the Geelong Race course to welcome Amy Johnson, and Will Samson tried to teach us a song, 'Welcome, Queen of the air, Geelong welcomes you'. Then came this girl in her green leather flying suit, Amy Johnson arrived in Geelong.

When I sat in the exam room I also looked out over the old cow paddock. What was the cow paddock? It brought back some memories which we might share. I remember of course seeing the cows there and old Sport Sire would take the cows off about three o'clock to milk them. Then you would remember perhaps, Mrs Rolland with her basket going across to gather the eggs because we had the fowl yards over near where Mackie is nowadays. Then, sometimes, after school, we would go and play on the cow paddock. I remember playing House matches there and there was a different dimension to football in those days because not only did you have to contend with the football and your opponents, but also the cow dung was a problem. Sometimes you would hear a boy saying 'Don't mark that', because he realized that the ball was covered with cow dung. 1930 or 31 was a very foggy year in Geelong. I remember playing a match or two there when on the northern wing, the lower wing, one couldn't see the ball on the southern wing because there was such a thick fog. In those days Geelong had so many open fireplaces, and I think about five o'clock all the Geelong housewives would use the old yackas, to start their fires. Do you remember the most astringent smell we used to get, a rather pleasant smell of burning yackas about five o'clock?

That of course takes me to the oval. Do you remember how popular it was to come for a walk around the oval? After lunch on a Sunday, perhaps after tea at night, you would get a friend or perhaps half a dozen friends and 'let's walk around the oval'. There was a letter which came the other day from Scotty White in England. Scotty White sent some photos and one of them was of Ducks Biggin. Now I remember one Sunday 'Ducks' saying 'Can I go for a walk around the oval with you, Mack'? 'Yes', and we went for a walk. He had a problem. On Saturday night he had been out to one of those very popular prefects' dances at Morongo. He had rather enjoyed the dance and particularly the company of one girl. She had a cousin here at school and he mentioned who she was. Then on Sunday morning he walked to Church up Aphrasia street and down Pleasant street and

along Retreat Road and of course there he met with the Hermitage 'crocodile' coming to All Saints. Biggin was quite convinced that one of the girls there, who had a brother here at school had waved to him from the crocodile. Now his problem was - which one should he go for? Apparently, he thought my advice was worth something Poor Ducks, it didn't matter much, for he didn't survive the war.

And do you remember sometimes people would pass in Aphrasia street and look across to the oval and think, 'that funny man, Mr Rolland, was introducing a new Religion'. You would see perhaps ten or a dozen boys kneeling on the oval. What were they doing?. Well... they had an hour's weeding on the oval because they had come back late from leave or something. And some of you no doubt did, an hour's weeding on the oval

Also of course by the oval was the old pavvy, 'with the Tuck Shop run by Punch'. He was helped by the prefects, some of whom I see here today. Prefects would serve at recess time but they soon found there were no profits in the tuck shop. The profits were all eaten by the prefects and so the running of the tuck shop by the prefects was not judged to be a great success. I also remember and some of you will too, how we had study at night. One night of the week, the Wednesday night, there was always a prefect on duty and some of the gentleman whom I can see, who sat up at the front, had a terribly difficult task of trying to control boys their own age and who had no intention of studying anyway. On more than one occasion, I remember the door opened on old Room A and the tall figure of the Headmaster would enter and wonder if perhaps we could be a little quieter because he was trying to work even if we weren't. His study adjoined Room A.

There was the day when we were rather electrified when Mr Rolland said 'That boy in the sixth row back, go home and change your collar'. 'Bully' Reid had a blue collar on and we were supposed to wear white. So Bully stood up and turned out to Retreat Road to go and change his collar. I think we thought twice about coming to assembly with the wrong collar next time.

When we went into assembly it was very noisy in the Hall for a start. Then the prefects would come in with the little note books and they would mark all the absentees. The boys of course tried to make it more difficult by moving up chairs where they were vacant and so on. The prefects got some sort of list out of it and then the staff would come in and there would be comparative quiet, except for the entry of the coach of one of the teams and he would get a great reception. Or perhaps one of the masters had announced his engagement. I remember Victor Profitt did once and we clapped Victor madly. Then assembly would start with the prefects taking a reading from the Bible. Some of those names in the Bible are pretty difficult I know, but the number of Old Testament characters who have the name 'Jerusalem', because there was nothing else they could think of, would be surprising. I understand that whenever a prefect read the name and he could not pronounce it he would say 'Jerusalem'. I learnt a lot of new prophets that year.