

Forty years later

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Not the "baby boomers", a more select group, "War babies" has been one description. We were part of that group born during World War II, in 1941, 1942 or 1943, when the situation was becoming serious and our mothers wondered if they and we would end up living under Japanese occupation.

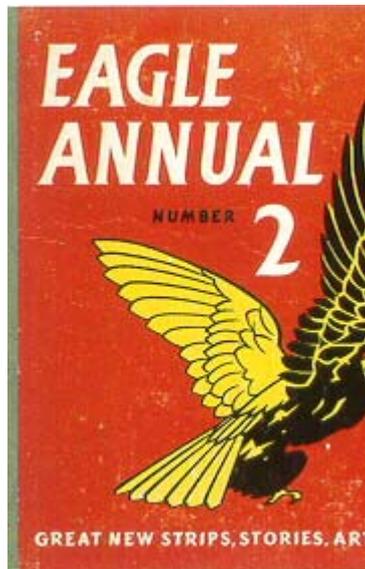


Not quite old enough to remember the impact that War made on Australia, except for the remains of air raid trenches dug in the garden and rusty signs at the top of the street announcing proudly "This is a War Savings Street".

Rationing was still in place during the post-War years, with coupons for the butcher. Christmas toys were made out of recycled munitions metal.

We grew up in a pre-television era, of radio serials, crystal sets, Jack Davey and Bob Dyer, where the greatest outing was to the Saturday afternoon "flicks" and comics were traded at the "Odeon" or the "Kings".

Zorro, Tarzan, Batman, the Phantom, Hopalong Cassidy, and the characters who featured in the *Mickey Mouse Weekly*, *Lion Magazine*, *The Champion* or *The Eagle*, had been our friends and companions.



Now we were coming together in 1999 to commemorate our last year of school in 1959 at Chevalier College Bowral.

"They will recognise you, more than you will recognise them ... I once went to a 30-year reunion and that's what happened". Words from a Brother at Penrose Park, that triumph of determination and faith over religious correctness.

But how could they have a greater facility for recognising me when I was them and they were me?

The **Sacred Heart Monastery at Kensington**. I knew it was somewhere on a hill. Roma street came into view; very aptly named but how on earth did the local Council get away with it, didn't they have nomenclature busy bodies in those days?

The hill has long been occupied by the MSCs and their friends. How many missionaries must have set off from those gates to postings around Australia and in the Islands? Perhaps their hearts sank when they discovered that their destination was Chevalier.

Cars everywhere, this is strange, there were only seventeen in our final class, a number used often during these past forty years to illustrate something. To imply a privileged education, a deprived education, or a uniqueness? I now know - it was very privileged, to be taught entirely by priests from a religious order.

I had read that it was also a special commemoration of former MSC staff who had died but still, a lot of people for a class of seventeen. What's this, a yellow late model Volvo? Someone must have succeeded at something. Later, I learn that it belongs to **Tony Ireland**, of "Ireland's Machinery" of Mittagong.

A group of people, mostly men, standing around in the cloisters. Not a familiar face at all, perhaps they were waiting for another gathering but gradually one by one the linking of familiar names to unfamiliar people. Some shook hands but didn't say who they were - how embarrassing, perhaps they did recognise me and assumed I knew who they were. Was this what Brother Matthew had meant?



L-R Denis Strangman, Geoff Caban, Peter Moore, Tony Herlihy (the "prompter" of the reunion), Geoff Walsh (seated),

John McKay, Brian McGregor, Tony Ireland (seated), Jim Connolly, Adrian Horan, Matt Shearer, Peter Herbert (seated), Michael Brown (temporarily absent).

In the background occasional choirsters in Lutheran-looking mauve flitting here and there, taking discreet sips from bottles of mineral water hidden in their gowns. I must tell my young athletes - these singers know that they need two litres a day, why don't you understand that? The sound of a trumpet. Was there an earlier service? Were we waiting until they finished? Was that why there were so many cars? Someone half-explained: "Michael does this very well, he's connected with a funeral firm".

Father Terry Herbert, son of builder the late Alfred Herbert, I was at the right place. It was Father Terry who discovered the Chalice left by my brother hidden in the walls of the Church at Yerranderie for those occasions when he said Mass while taking groups from Chevalier for outdoor education.



Fr Terry and his brother Peter on right.

We filed into the Chapel, most sitting on the right in groups of three and four as we had done forty years ago in the Chev Chapel, once the grand ballroom for its original occupants. It looked vaguely familiar but when had I last been there, maybe fifty years ago? Michael entered. Definitely a person with presence, wearing a cream alb - Anglo-Catholic at the front and American-Episcopalian at the back. He had a whole page of introduction in the Order of Service, concluding "I hope this celebration brings you Peace". It was to be a remembrance of the dead before a reunion of the living.

Enter the Choir, the **Jacobean Singers** from Sydney. Not Lutherans, but Anglicans. *Te Deum Charpentier* by a real trumpeter, not someone who can barely make it to the end of the Last Post. Down the outside aisles, joining at the front and processing to the back. Boys and girls, men and women, grandparents possibly, they looked as though they might be part of one big family, all related to each other. The girls wore sandals, perhaps they were Anglican Franciscans? Whatever, they sang beautifully.

A welcome by the Provincial **Fr Bob Irwin MSC**, pre-empting raised eyebrows at today's Reading "When a man takes a wife ...". Definitely not Penrose Park.

Geoff Caban, standing next to me, turned in amazement "Look, **Gerry Kelly** is reading the Gospel without any glasses", showing me the half-moon pair which he now used.

How could it be that Fr G Kelly, Headmaster when we were there, who looked out from his darkened office as we crunched on the gravel on our way to the Chapel, had not aged at all?



Michael Brown in blue shirt (L) Fr Gerry Kelly (R)

Trevor Bouffier read the list of deceased staff. So, **Father Bell** had died. **Br Ide**, who used to drive the College bus to our sporting engagements. **Fr McCormack**, the Bursar who ran a small store for stamps and other necessities, **Leo Carew**, the first lay teacher at Chevalier.

Later, **Michael Brown** added three names of fellow students who had since died. I recognised only one, **Peter Loughnan** - "Fluff". In those cold dormitories, where we slept in parallel lines, he was next to me, closest to the wall. We both laid out our Army Cadet-issue greatcoats on top of our beds over the four or

five dark blankets, the empty sleeves tucked under the mattress, trying to keep the cold away. Perhaps he also heard the whistles of the express trains in the still of the night as they rushed past the Wingecaribee River. I wonder how he died? One of the other two was **John Grilz** who was employed at Southern Portland Cement Works as an electrician and died aged 31 years from a medical condition. The other was **Paul Conlon** who died as a result of a motor vehicle accident.



P Loughnan

A polished Homily by Father Irwin. I didn't know that Fr Jules Chevalier was only the same height as Napoleon. Every painting shows him as wizened, with white hair and a beret. Forcibly removed from his Presbytery to die in a secular home, fighting adversity to the end, Fr Irwin told us. More singing "*O Nata Lux*". I'd like to have them sing at my funeral Mass but how could you get them to come to Canberra?

There were lamingtons in the dining room, if we wished, but most made for the Woolloomooloo Bay Hotel where lunch had been arranged.

One person I did recognise immediately, **Matt Shearer**. He reminded me that we had last met in 1968 when he had an argument with me on a bus. 1968! I don't remember. He is talking to someone who has had to carry a list of the birthdates of his children in his wallet for 20-plus years. Remember an argument on a bus in 1968!



Matt Shearer (hand on head), Geoff Caban (with glass), Brian McGregor (hand to chin)

Next to him, studying two sheets of 1959 photos taken from Matt's album, was **Brian MacGregor**, now of Perth. Brian always had a twinkle in his eyes and seemed to have a tartan scarf as a permanent fixture attached to his throat, a fact proven by one of the photos. Hard to now make out the twinkle behind those lenses which change with the light but not surprising to learn that he studied in Edinburgh for a year. Did the Scots know that he was a colonial or did he fool them with his tartan scarf?

Others arrive. **Geoff Walsh**, apologising for being the only smoker. Retired, I think, after working with BHP. White hair and moustache. Yes, you could arrange one of those time-lapse sequences showing the maturing process (not the "aging process" we are too young for that) between the youth of 17 and the man of 57. Everyone would see the connection. He recalled the thumping we received from the Jervis Bay naval cadets. Did his body still feel the crunch of a tackle and the hard earth? The historians should note that it was in 1959 that our First XV inflicted the first ever defeat by Chevalier on the mighty St Patrick's Goulburn First XV. 3-0 was the score with a try by **Paul Blatch** on a playing field covered in permafrost, according to Michael Brown's recollection.

A similar time lapse illusion with **John Phelan**, who taught us Ancient History, and is still in education as International Promotions Officer at UWS Macarthur. Not much change to his features.

John McKay was always tall. He came from Delegate. "Did he have any photos of his years at Chevalier?" I asked. No, they were all lost in a fire on the family property. He's into pumps and spent time in the North-West of WA during the mineral boom years. How come he has got taller and most of us have

shrunk?

Peter Moore must have been chuckling for the past forty years. He chuckled during his school years and is still chuckling. Property adviser with some firm, I am told. Like **Tony Ireland** he has a full head of hair. Brian, Geoff, Matt, me, we are going bald or have achieved baldness. Perhaps that's why Matt supervises a swag of education psychologists - all that cerebral activity.



Peter Moore (R) talking to Jim Connolly

Michael Brown is our MC. After several years in the seminary he worked with Boeing but is now a facilities manager with the pollsters A C Nielsen. I don't think he has changed much. In appearance yes, not in his style and manner, still gracious as ever. Michael can still remember the 200 lines **Fr Tom Whitty** gave him in 1955: ""When I am told to close my book, I will close it immediately - and underline immediately"!"

Adrian Horan has turned out to be the antithesis of the time-lapse approach. I had to ask him his name. Perhaps the real Adrian sent a friend to deputise for him at the reunion. Adrian's representative told me that he works at Samsung these days. A la "October Sky" Adrian recalled looking up at the sky in 1957 and seeing the Russian Sputnik flying overhead. He was certain that it was my bed, with me asleep in it, that a group had silently transported from the dorm to the frosty lawn outside. I can't recall. He remembers the expanse of white lawn from the Chapel to the Oval. Our memories centre around the cold of the Southern Highlands - the clear skies, the frost, the fog, the occasional snowfall.



Snow at Chevalier 15 June 1958. The same year that Tony (R) met his future wife - "city slicker meets country hick".

Matt reads out the apologies but many are lost in the hum of a nearby refrigerator. Sydney is heading for

an unseasonal 32 degrees. I do catch a mention that **Laurie Scully** the dentist is about to become a grandfather and sends his apologies, as does another dentist **Paul Blatch**. **Rick Streatfield** is in Cairns. Nothing has been sighted of **Paul Galvin** for many years. Apologies from **Laurie Lau**, he is in Hong Kong for a month but sends a donation "for a drink on me for all your friendship and good classmates when I was at Chevalier" ... **Fr Keith Humphries MSC**, Nagoya, Japan, where he is Ministering at the [Mikokoro \(Sacred Heart\) Centre](#) and where - if you check out the website - you will find that he conducts Bible study classes in both Japanese and the Japanese sign language!... **Fr Paul Brennan MSC** thought it a bit far to come from Rome for the lunch ... **Fr W M Ross MSC**, usually in Brisbane but in the USA on the day of our function. Later, I am given the complete list of apologies. It's amazing how many were tracked down, not just the final leavers in 1959 but those who were part of the journey from the first secondary Year in 1955, students, staff and teachers: **Kevin Buckley, Tony Clout, Neil Coggan, Br Terry Foley MSC, Brian Hingerty, Michael Joseph, Br Dave Merrick MSC, Fr Tony Prentice MSC, Gabriel Seeto, Kerrie O'Brien, Fr Harold Baker MSC, Gilbert Cook, Allen Duggan, Mark Foster, Terry Giles, Br Peter Harvey Jackson MSC, John Hinton, Tony Limon, Fr Bob Rippin MSC, Fr Fred Ross MSC, Simon Seeto**. A possibility that **Tony Baine** might yet call at the luncheon and treat us to a rendition of some Irish songs but he is unable to attend.



Keith Humphries c. 1958



Simon Seeto & firewood axe c. 1958



Laurence Lau c. 1958



Michael Joseph c. 1958



Ricky Streatfield
c. 1958



The two Pauls - Paul
Galvin (L) and Paul
Blatch (R) c.1958



Laurie Scully c. 1958

Michael calls on **Jim Connolly**, now a Major-General (Rtd) and perhaps the highest achiever of the class of 1959, to convey a few memories. He recalls being inducted into the lingo of the place when he first arrived with references to "the Kremlin" i.e. Bosco House. Could he ever imagine that forty years into the future one of his last tasks as Commander, Australian Theatre, would be to host an official lunch for a group of aging Vietnamese Generals, some of whom undoubtedly were personally familiar with the real Kremlin?



The "Kremlin" (Bosco House)

Jim lists the nicknames we (really, Matt) had for our various teachers. He blames **Father Bill Ross** for inflicting phasing and analysis on him and he, in turn, inflicting the rudiments of English on generations of junior officers. He has, somewhere, as I do, a Daily Missal with those seventeen signatures in it, penned on our last day (10 November 1959). His list includes an irreverent exhortation in French "Do not spill the gravy". Most of us ostentatiously signed our names with a middle initial - in deference no doubt to the growing post-War American cultural influence: Michael A Brown, Brian W Kennedy, Geoffrey M Walsh, A G Caban, Peter Milton Moore, K M Buckley, Brian McGregor, Paul F Galvin, Cornelius P Ryan, Matthew Andrew Shearer, Paul Douglas Blatch, James Michael Connolly, Rick Streatfield, A W Ireland, Adrian Horan, L Scully, and Denis W Strangman.



Jim Connolly remembers. Peter Moore on his left. John Phelan (white beard)

I think Jim is now bee-farming up north but when I order steak, medium-done for lunch, he calls out

loudly "well-done" so I change my order to well-done thinking that he must possess local information that the steak will be more edible if it is well-done. Not so, he was simply applauding my endorsement of the beef industry, so I deduce he might be into bees and beef. When the steak arrives it is underdone.

Father Fletcher is there. He plans to do more writing, once he has the space in his mind and his environment. He is still involved with aboriginal work. He tells us how when we were at Chevalier, aged 17 or 18, he was only 27. **John Phelan**, now living at Jamberoo, adds "I was only 25". The teachers were not much older than those they were teaching. He tells some amusing anecdotes about our discipline master **Father Bell**. Not only did he set high standards for us but also for the junior priests in the community.

Frank Fletcher recalls a Dutch father settling in his two boys at the College in the early days. The parent asked "Which of the sheds do the boys sleep in?" The architecture was post-war fibro. But he also mentions how parents were amazed at the low fees, perhaps £50 per term and the principal explanation was that none of the staff were drawing a salary - a salutary reminder of how we benefited from the sacrifice and generosity of others. No large superannuation payouts for them. He reveals that another of our teachers **Fr Rippin** has retired and is Chaplain to a group of retired nuns at Glebe. Someone recalls Fr Rippin passing around a cigarette in the school bus on our way in to Bowral for the LC - perhaps another memory gilded by the passage of time. Someone else recalls the rows of girls at the LC exams, all in blue uniforms. Annersley, Frencham? It doesn't matter, they were out of bounds, however, the girls from "Dom Con" at Moss Vale were slightly in bounds. Nothing to do with religion, you understand. Father Fletcher also mentions that **Father Tony Prentice** has painful arthritic knees and has retired to Chevalier, his days of motorbike riding long past.



Fr Frank: "Fr Bell laughed at episodes in which he was involved. There was this parent after Mass who kept asking 'How is Josip going in English?' Fr Bell (repeatedly): 'You MUST ask his teacher, I can't tell you'. Parent (eventually): 'But you ARE his teacher!'.

Frank Fletcher acknowledged that they did some good things as teachers and some not so good things. He recalled counselling one student to think of leaving school because he just wasn't coping with study, including writing. Years later, meeting the student after he had made his mark in the world he asked how he had got on despite his poor English and the man replied "I had five secretaries to look after my correspondence".

Strangely there is not much talk about families or wives but I gather that there are offspring in their twenties, some who have just completed the HSC, and others even younger, including my youngest son who is thirteen. Tony Ireland's wife Sue accompanied him to the Mass but not the lunch. Perhaps she understood that this was a gathering of men with memories to be taken out of storage and shared around.

I don't think I could ever send my sons to a boarding school. I was only at Chevalier for two years, not the five complete years of secondary, nor the additional primary years at OLSH, which was the case with some who were present at this reunion - nine years all told.

They were happy years but they were years separated from a family. In my case I suspect I was sent there because I was in danger of 'going off the rails'. My father had died when I was 12 and so there was this vacuum which boarding school was to fill.

There were others who had lost a parent but I cannot recall very much discussion about families or parents. Occasionally you caught a glimpse of someone's parent or relative during a visiting Sunday. The lucky ones were treated to lunch at Bowral Hotel. There was a representation of farmers' sons and it was

perfectly understandable why they had been sent to a boys boarding school, be it St Pat's, St Gregory's, St Stanislaus', Chevalier or Inveralochy, but for the others I suspect there were very private reasons. The seventeen of us comprised our family for the duration of the school year. "*Denis, there's a trunk call for you in the booth*". "*Hello?*" "*Grandma died today*". Sydney was a lengthy steam train ride away and you only made the trip at the end of term, unless for exceptional reasons.

We wrote letters home of a Sunday night and the day boys smuggled the occasional illicit letter to a girlfriend. Inwards letters were distributed during mealtime in the refectory. If you were lucky you scored a double - a letter, and meat pies on the menu. Somewhere in the 159 boxes of the archival records of my lifetime are the letters I wrote home to my mother. When the time is right I will look at them. They probably tell of the fun we had in a sporting match, a bus trip to Inveralochy, the films in the hall, **Br Merrick's** haircuts, the Saturday afternoon milkshakes. We were not very sophisticated nor were our expectations very high.

It would have been interesting to learn what others believe their years at Chevalier gave them. The time devoted by **Father Prentice** to the Cadet Unit was obviously not wasted, with **Con Ryan** and **Jim Connolly** both entering the Army. **Michael Brown** acknowledged that Father Prentice awakened an interest in Science in him.

For my part I think that the Saturday morning Athenaeum made an important contribution to my education for life. Being able to speak in front of an audience has been useful, whether on the back of a truck in Mount Isa in the 1960s, or at a national Coaching Congress last month. Writing also. Was it **Father Ryan** who encouraged our first printed newsletter and our tentative contributions? Two years after leaving school I was well prepared to submit my first article for publication to a young and lean student editor by the name of Laurie Oakes who was then trying to prove his journalistic skills prior to employment as a Police Reporter for the Daily Mirror.

Sydney produced an unseasonably warm November day for the 1959 reunion. The long car trip home afforded plenty of time to remember life as it was forty years ago. As I left the outskirts of Sydney it was still 32 degrees but gradually the sun lost its heat and by Marulan there was a fresh breeze. I couldn't be bothered fiddling with the radio to pick up the clearest station and so I played a cassette tape with the window open, letting in the cool air. It was by the Sherrah Family, a group of singers from the Blue Mountains area, and one of the songs was called simply "Dear Friend ...". Nothing spectacular, a nice tune, very simple ... "Dear Friend ... it's time to say goodbye ...until we meet again I'll keep you in my heart ...".

That's the long and the short of it.

Denis Strangman

If anyone else has some recollections or photographs I'll happily add them to this site. Send them to me at: 10 Carrodus Street, Fraser ACT 2615. So far, I have been able to utilise 1958 and 1959 photos sent to me by Brian McGregor and Laurie Lau (via Michael Brown) but I am the first to admit that some of the enlargements I have made are not the best.

Here are some more photos from Laurie Lau's collection:

<http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Stream/2327/lau.htm>

And here is some memorabilia for 1958-59, saved from the silverfish:

<http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Stream/2327/memo.htm>

Here are some photos enlarged from the reunion group contrasted with their owners 40 years ago:

<http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Stream/2327/photos.html>

I am sure I have a 1959 Class photo somewhere but so far I have not unearthed it.

The following are some e-mail addresses I collected at the lunch and later from Michael Brown. If there are others let me know and I'll include them in the list:

Adrian Horan - adrian@posmagic.com.au

Laurie Lau - y.bond@amaze.net.au

Tony Herlihy (credited by Michael as the inspiration for the function) - tony@venuetech.com.au

Geoff Walsh - jangeoff@bigpond.com.au

Tony Ireland - irelands@whireland.com.au or aztec@acenet.com.au

Fr Keith Humphries MSC - k@mikokoro.net or cphk@lily.ocn.ne.jp Mikokoro (Sacred Heart) Centre:
<http://www.mikokoro.net/>

Matt Shearer - shearermt@hotmail.com

Geoff Caban - geoffrey.caban@uts.edu.au

Fr Frank Fletcher MSC - [ffletcher@ozemail.com.au](mailto:fjfletcher@ozemail.com.au)

John McKay - jolymckay@bigpond.com.au

Jim Connolly - little-duck@bigpond.com

Michael Brown - mbrown@acnielsen.com.au

Denis Strangman - string@hotkey.net.au

Fr Harold Baker MSC - stjohns@ozemail.com.au

Fr Paul Brennan MSC - brennan@misacor.org

Terry Giles - graeme@opalinfo.com

Peter Herbert - pherbert@dynamite.com.au

Brian McGregor - brian.mcgregor@hcn.net.au

John Phelan - j.phelan@uws.edu.au or largobrae@telstra.easymail.com.au

Tony Baine - baine@bigpond.com or tbaine@carroll-odea.com.au

Some other Internet sites I maintain or have constructed:

Dedication of the Strangman Studio at Chevalier: <http://www.hotkey.net.au/~string/Dedication.html>

Notes on Father Bryan Strangman: <http://www.hotkey.net.au/~string/Denis.html>

[Marg's Journey](#) (Margaret Strangman's journey with a malignant brain tumour)

ACT Racewalking Club: <http://www.hotkey.net.au/~string/ACTRWC.htm>

LBG Carnival: <http://www.hotkey.net.au/~string/99lbg.htm> (By the way - "GWS Photogrpahy" is my 15 year old son.)

AT&FCA Website: <http://www2.eis.net.au/~atfca/index.html>

Mocollop in Ireland: <http://www.hotkey.net.au/~string/mocollop.htm>

Avoca in Victoria: <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~adhs/ADHSMain.htm>