A BRIEF HISTORY OF ANNA BAY AND ITS SCHOOL

1 THE EXPLORERS

To gain some understanding of the background to the development of Anna Bay, we need to look briefly at the early history of the Port Stephens area.

The earliest recorded inhabitants of the district were the Worrimi and Gringai tribes of Aborigines, who were peaceful people living a typically subsistence life. Although other neighbouring tribes reacted less peaceably to the white man’s intrusion, the natives of Port Stephens were apparently lived reasonably harmoniously with the early white settlers.

In April 1770, James Cook sighted the Port and named it in honour of Sir Phillip Stephens, Secretary to the Admiralty, noting in his log book that it appeared “to be sheltered from all winds” and that “there might be a sufficient depth for shipping water in the bay”.

As far as is known, the first vessel to enter the Port as the “Salamander” which was transporting convicts to Sydney. A sketch of the harbour was made and Salamander Bay was named after the vessel. Four years later, in 1795, Deputy Surveyor Charles Grimes charted the Port. He was unimpressed noting the mangrove swamps and sandy soil. Soldiers Point which is to be significant in our story is named “Friendship Point” on his map. In the same year Captain Broughton, seeking shelter from a storm, discovered four escaped convicts living with the Aborigines in the Port.

It was a search for runaway convicts which led Lieutenant John Shortland to brave a narrow inlet some 30 km to the south of Port Stephens in 1797. Here he found coal, and settlement soon followed. Thus began the city of Newcastle, on Port hunter. Initially it was a convict settlement and free settlers were not permitted. However, in 1822 it was opened up for
settlement and eventually became the gateway to the Hunter Valley. Although Port Stephens was a superior deep-water port, it was eclipsed by Morpeth and Newcastle, and so remained relatively undisturbed and unspoilt.

Groups of Chinese fishermen are reported to have lived in Port Stephens for several years in the early 1800’s, but the next visitor of note was Governor Lachlan Macquarie, the man who did most to advance the colony of New South Wales in its early years. Macquarie had thought of establishing a settlement to the north of Coal River (Newcastle). In the vessel “Lady Nelson”, Macquarie explored the port in 1812, naming both Nelson and Shoal Bays. Subsequent to his visit, a small military post was established at Friendship Point, its function being to apprehend escaping convicts who might attempt to cross the Port via Middle (Boondaba) Island. From that time the peninsula became known as Soldiers Point.

From about 1816 onwards, cedar getters became regular visitors to the Port and there are also reports of convicts collecting shells for lime in the Taylor’s Beach area. The first recorded settlers on the south side of the Port were, however, Captain William Cromarty and his wife Cecilia, grandparents of six of the first pupils of Hannah Bay Provisional School.

2 THE PIONEERS

The Cromarty Family

Captain Cromarty had been master of the vessel “Sovereign” and in 1824 he decided to settle in New South Wales. He and his wife lived for a time in Newcastle. For ‘services rendered to the British Government’ he was given a land grant which he selected near Booral on the Karuah River. His choice however, proved inconvenient for the government, as it formed part of approximately one million acres to be allotted to the Australian Agricultural Company. (This company, with the wool pioneer, John Macarthur as a shareholder, subsequently began sheep
farming on a large scale of the northern side of the Port, establishing its headquarters at Carrington, and later Stroud. When the land was proven to be unsuited to wool production, the company’s activities were transferred to other areas and its contribution to the rather meagre trade of the port ceased.) William Cromarty was therefore persuaded to exchange his original grant for 300 acres at Soldiers point and this land remained in the family until resumed for a proposed naval base in 1916.

In 1833 Captain Cromarty left the Port to become the Newcastle Pilot, a position which he held until seriously injured. He also traded along the coast in a small brig named “Fame”. In 1838 he and his eldest son, William, were apparently drowned at Anna Bay.

Mrs Cecilia Cromarty, her son Magnus and daughters Elizabeth, Mary and Cecilia continued to live at Soldiers Point, establishing a store to sell goods to visiting whalers and fishermen. Ever amongst pioneer womenfolk, Mrs Cromarty must have been a lady of outstanding courage and resource as Magnus was then only nine and the area was very isolated and lonely. The Australian Agricultural Company’s settlement was some 8 km a cross the harbour. Mrs Cromarty was renowned for her kindness. At one time two escaping convicts, intent upon robbing the store, were treated to a meal by Mrs Cromarty, and were so ashamed, they left without attempting the robbery. When she died in 1862, storms prevented her body being taken to Carrington to be interred next to her husband’s so she was buried near Johnny’s Well, where whalers watered. Her headstone can still be seen on a hillside looking out towards the heads.

Magnus Cromarty, son of William and Cecilia, was named after St Magnus, patron saint of the Orkney Islands where his father was born. During the gold rush days of the 1850’s Magnus was moderately successful at Ballarat and Bendigo, and returned and purchased land at Bob’s Farm which was then part of the area known as Hannah Bay.

The name Bobs Farm is believed to have originated with Bob, a convict stockman for an Englishman known as Gentleman Smith. (Smith’s Lake to the north of Myall Lake, is reputed to
be named after him.) Bob had long admired a tract of Smith’s land, stating that he would like to acquire it when he had served his time. On this land, Magnus Cromarty grew wheat and arrowroot, and kept sheep, pigs and poultry He brought the first wheeled vehicle the Tomaree Peninsula – a spring cart, that was somehow pulled through miles of trackless bush.

In 1859 he married Christina McIntosh who later became the midwife in the district. From this couple descended the Cromarty family which now has many branches in the Port Stephens and Hunter areas. They had 14 children, 12 of whom survived. Of these, 6 were amongst the first pupils of Hannah Bay School – Ann, 14 years; Christina, 12; John, 10; James, 8; Magnus, 6; and Neil, 4. Younger children also attended the school as they became of school age.

When the children grew up, many of them selected marriage partners from the neighbouring families, as might be expected in such an isolated district. Some remained in the area, the boys to become farmers, the girls farmers’ wives. Magnus Junior however, had been born with a partial disablement of both feet, a real hardship for a farmer, and so his father sent him to Newcastle for further education, and he became an accountant. In the early 20’s he was elected to parliament, becoming MLA for Wickham. He died in 1925 and was laid to rest near his parents, relatives and friends in the old Anna Bay Cemetery at Cemetery Point, now known as Birubi Point.
The Blanch Family

The first settlers in the area known as Anna Bay were John and Lucy Blanch. They had previously farmed a property at Oakfield, Salt Ash, but because of a number of wet seasons, John and his sons rode up the beach in search of better land. They selected the area known as Birubi Point. In about 1855 a small home was erected near the point to the east of the spot where the old cemetery now stands. On the southern side a wall of earth and rock was constructed as protection from the weather, and to shield the lights of the house from shipping for the purposes of navigation safety. The remains of this wall have disappeared. Because of the beauty of the spot Mrs Blanch chose this as her burial place, and was in fact the first person to be laid to rest there. The name Cemetery Point, in use until about 1955, has its origin in this event.

As well as the normal crops favoured by the pioneers, John Blanch established a vineyard, and the vines did well until wiped out by disease. Later he began a butchery business, probably supplying the infant settlement at Nelson Bay.

Their family was of average size for those days – 5 boys (Alfred, William, Charles, John and Henry) and 3 girls (Louise, Emily and Ann). The boys selected farms in the area and Charles continued his father’s butchery business. By 1879 four of the brothers had children of school age and between them they listed the names of 13 children on the application submitted to the Council of Education – half the total number of names. They are:

Alfred’s children – Sydney 13; Henry 11; Emeline 9; Amy 7; Josephine 5.

William’s children – William 8; Laurel 6 1/2; John 5 1/2; Charles 4.


The name of Henry Blanch, John Blanc Senior’s fifth son, appears on an application for a new school building in 1883, so it seems that he had at least one child at school that year. There are now numerous descendants of John and Lucy Blanch in the Port Stephens, Hunter and
Gloucester areas. Arch and Harry Blanch operated the first service car to Newcastle and opened a bakery and general store in Nelson Bay, so the name Blanch became familiar to early visitors.

George Robinson

On the application of 1879, Charles Blanch submitted the name of George Robinson (aged 14) beneath those of his own children. George, believed to have been orphaned by the death of his parents in a sulky accident, was apparently under the guardianship of Charles. In later years, George married his school-friend Ann, daughter of Magnus Cromarty and they had four sons – Joe, Magnus, Archibald and Neil, all of whom attended Anna Bay School, as have many of their numerous descendants since.

The Banks Family

Captain James Banks, Master Mariner, was born in Yarmouth, England, in 1828. He came to Australia in the early 1850’s and married Cecilia, the third daughter of Captain William Cromarty, in 1857. Like Cromarty, Captain Banks had a small trading vessel in which he carried shell from Port Stephens to Stockton where it was burnt for lime in kilns. After his marriage he settled at the Wallace (Wallis) Estate, which came to be generally known as Banks’s and is now called Taylor’s Beach. His wife Cecilia became well-known in the district for her bush-wife capabilities. A grandson, Mr Thomas Eagleton, 83 of Anna Bay, says “I’ve seen her kill a fat cow, cut it up, and dress it as good as any butcher”. She could split logs better than her husband, and had a wrist which had stiffened and swollen from injuries which she suffered when her muzzle-loader exploded when she was shooting ducks on Anna Bay Swamp. Many Banks descendants have attended our school including Mr Eagleton, his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. They are descendants of Sarah 14; Frank 12; Charles 10; Louise 8 and Emily 6 who were children of Captain Banks, but were enrolled by their brother George.
The Upton Family

Of those pupils to enrol in 1879, little Morris Upton, 5, had the longest journey to school – 2 1/4 miles. His father, Philip, had begun farming early at Bobs Farm, possibly before the Cromartys. Philip’s brother, Thomas, also took up property there and his name appears on the 1883 letter with that of Henry Blanch. Descendants of the brothers have followed in their footsteps, farming the fertile land along Tilligerry Creek, while Upton’s Store became a landmark in the area. It was patronised by Anna Bay residents, as well as those of Bobs Farm. The Upton family appears to have remained in the Bobs Farm area and extended in the direction of Williamstown and Raymond Terrace, rather than towards Anna Bay. Their name does not appear in the school register of the 1920’s, no doubt because a school had been opened at Bobs Farm in 1918.

A Mr Hart settled at Bobs Farm in the early years also but no evidence can be found of his having children at the school.

3 A SCHOOL! THE EARLY YEARS

By the late 1870’s the pioneer families of Anna Bay included 26 children of school age, as we have seen. Their struggle for a school and the events of the following 20 years are vividly portrayed by Mr J Fletcher of the Directorate of Planning, Department of Education, in a history prepared from Departmental records especially for the School’s Centenary. He wrote:

“Establishing a School

In the 1870’s Anna Bay (or Hannah Bay as it was known as until 1896) was a string of small farms threaded along the rough, impassable in the wet, government road that wandered around stumps and
skirted marshy areas on its way down the southern arm of Port Stephens. In those days and for years after, the district might more appropriately have been called Blanch Ville or Cromarty Town, as these two families, the Blanches especially, owned much of Anna Bay. Although it was 100 years since Governor Phillip had led the first wave of European settlers to New South Wales had he been able to return with a second wave in the 1870’s he would have found Anna Bay less advanced than Sydney had been when he left it in 1792. There was no school, no church, no public buildings at all.

Yet there were considerable differences noticeable in New South Wales since Phillip’s time. As this history is about a school we shall of course be most interested in the educational changes that had occurred. When Phillip left the colony there were less than a half dozen schools in operation; 100 years later, New South Wales had a system of government and non-government schools that numbered over 1000 and 200 respectively. A Council of Education in Sydney controlled these schools throughout the colony and distributed government aid to non-government schools.

The Council of Education was not a benefactor, sitting in its Macquarie Street office eagerly scanning the colony-scape through the eyes of its inspectors in the hope of finding educationally destitute places like Anna Bay where enough children were available for it beneficially to provide a school. On the contrary, it was expected that the initiative in providing a school must come from the community. Anna Bay had the choice of providing its own school, without the help from outside, or asking for assistance from the government, through the Council of Education. The first alternative was possible in favourable circumstances, but it required the local residents to provide a building for the school, a residence (or at least board) for the teacher, and fees in sufficient quantities to encourage a teacher to stay. Experience in other parts of New South Wales had shown that fees were usually inadequate to attract or retain any but the worst in teachers, in which case the children might have been better off in the open air helping their parents than cooped up with a teacher who did nothing to advance them educationally.

The other alternative, and the one which was eventually taken, was to ask the Council of Education to help. The Council’s help could come in two different ways. If the school laws likely to have more than
twenty-five pupils in average attendance then the council would establish a Public School and provide everything – site, building, furniture and a teacher. If less than twenty-five but more than twelve were expected, the Council could establish a provisional school and provide only the teacher’s salary and some of the educational textbooks and equipment. The site, building, furniture, fencing - in fact the total physical plant (as the Americans would say) – had to come from the local community. This was a compromise for smaller communities between having no school and having one entirely provided.

What was Anna Bay’s position in regard to the above possibilities? There were 26 children available, ranging from the four year olds, Earnest and Charles Blanch and Neil Cromarty, to the two fourteen year olds, Ann Cromarty and Sarah Banks. Long experience had taught the Council of Education that at least 35 to 40 children needed to be enrolled in order to have an average attendance of 25. But this is going in advance of events a little. On 1 September 1879, probably at the instigation of Alfred Blanch, a letter was sent to the Council of Education asking for a Provisional School for Anna Bay. It was explained that there had been a “great want” of a school experienced in Anna Bay and that residents were erecting a suitable building for a school which was expected to be ready in about a month’s time. Would it be possible for the council to appoint as teacher, Mr Alfred Holmes, the son of the teacher of the Church of England School, West Maitland?

The Council’s reaction was always the same in such cases. It immediately sent to Alfred Blanch the proper forms to fill in. So, on September 12, 1879, an official application for a Provisional School was made, duly signed by Alfred and John Blanch, Magnus Cromarty and Philip Upton. All were farmers, and apart from Cromarty, who was Presbyterian, all were Church of England. Indeed of the 26 children, 20 were Church of England and 6 Presbyterians. More details were provided this time. The proposed building for the school was a slab and bark structure, 18 x 12 feet, capable of holding about 20 pupils. Attached to one end was a room designed as sleeping quarters for the teacher. The school belonged, one must assume, to William Blanch as it was situated in one of his open paddocks, fronting the government road. There was as yet no desks and forms in the school, only the promise that residents would make them.
The Council of Education sent its Newcastle Inspector of schools to report on the application. Inspector J C Maynard examined the building, talked to local residents, tested the suitability of Holmes as a teacher, and reported this way:

“This school is needed for a group of selectors near the southern entrance of Port Stephens. The residents are prepared to meet all conditions requisite for establishing a Provisional School. I beg to recommend that the application be granted and that the applicants be informed that, when they certify that the building is complete and supplied with necessary forms and desks, a teacher will be appointed.”

The Council accepted Maynard’s recommendation and awaited word from Anna Bay to say that the necessary furniture was ready. The building and furniture were completed on 23 November 1879 and it is probably that Holmes began teaching then even though he had not been officially appointed by the Council of Education. By the time all the paper work was done and more suitable desks obtained from the school at Raymond Terrace (these desks were in fact in store from the closed school at the Parading Ground) it was not until 21 November that Holmes was officially appointed to the school. However, as the Council of Education may have back-dated Holmes’ salary, it is impossible to be exact about the precise starting date of the school. October or November 1879 is as close as we can get.

Alfred Holmes, the First Teacher

Alfred Holmes was a young, unmarried man of 22 years of age. He had lived in the district for about eight years or so, since leaving school at Parading Ground where his father had been teaching until 1871. According to the local residents and Inspector Maynard, Alfred was well respected and unimpeachable in character; he was likely, thought Maynard, to make a fair teacher. Did that mean that he wasn’t a teacher to begin with? Holmes’ only acquaintance with the classroom had been as a pupil himself. Since leaving school he had worked as a carpenter, and had given up that occupation to “better himself” as he said. In Governor Phillip’s time his first teacher had been a lace-maker, and a thief, by conviction.
Holmes spent his time teaching the three R's to his 18 regular pupils, on occasion treating a little geography and grammar, with a little singing at times. Each week he collected school fees of sixpence per child which he pocketed as part of his salary. This side of his duties changed in 1880 with the passing of the so-called “free secular and compulsory “Public Instruction Act”. He still collected fees each week, but they were reduced to only three pence per child, the money not going into Holmes’ pocket but into consolidated revenue, with Holmes’ salary being adjusted to compensate for the lost fees.

The 1880’s and a New Building

The compulsory clauses of the 1880 Act made little difference to attendance at Anna Bay; most children of school age were already enrolled. Nor did the abolition of the Council of Education and its replacement by the present Department of Education make any different to the school at Anna Bay. Lessons went on as before, the inspector of schools continued to make his annual pilgrimage, and the Blanchs and the Cromartys continued to be staunch supporters of the school, contributing generously to its enrolment. People, such as George Morant, the local limeburner were occasionally out of work when shell was scarce, but otherwise residents were in fairly comfortable circumstances for the times. A glance at enrolments and attendance in Appendix B will show that the school maintained a steady state in the early 1880’s with enrolments generally in the twenties. There was a slight growth in population in the area, but this was mainly further out along the peninsula at almost the end of the world, past the swamp-land, in the village of Teramby, or Nelson Bay as it was known.

One useful thing the Public Instruction Act did which was to benefit Anna Bay was to lower the number of pupils required for a Public School, from an average attendance of 25 to 20. So it was that in 1882, when average attendance just managed the 20 mark, Anna Bay Provisional School was converted to a Public School. Theoretically this meant that the Department of Education was now responsible for the school site and buildings; but as the school already had these things, the Department took no action to
replace them. This was certainly not what the local residents expected to happen. In June 1883 Thomas Bowen the teacher opened the campaign for a new school in these terms:

“I beg most humbly to apply for lodging allowance as there is no room attached to the school fit for a bedroom; there is indeed a room but it has some slabs out of the wall, and half the roof is off and the floor is rotting away. The whole building is in fact falling down and I would not be in the least surprised if I saw the whole building blown down, as it is tottering now. No man could sleep in it without running a great risk and it is not fit to house cattle much more a human being.”

Bowden got his lodging allowance, but there was silence regarding the building. Two months later local residents took the offensive. In a petition to their local member of parliament (signed by ten local men but in the handwriting of Thomas Bowden) they wrote:

“. . . we have no school fit for our children to go to; we have a building, certainly, called a school but it is a disgrace to the name. The building was put up nearly five years ago, but it was only put up as a temporary building thinking that the Department of Public Instruction would build another school in a short time. The new school was indeed Gazetted about 12 months ago but after all nothing came of it; the school was never built, and the present building is falling down. It has very little roof, the slabs are shrunk leaving large crevices and to describe the whole building by writing would indeed be an impossibility for it is beyond description.”

They asked the local member to get them a school and residence to replace the “tumble down shed” they now had. The petition was not only in Bowden’s handwriting but had his sardonic turn of phrase.

Was Anna Bay to continue to have facilities more suited to its primitive days? The inspector of schools thought not. In September 1883 he visited Anna Bay and selected a new 2 acre site fronting the government road, I suspect almost opposite the original site on William Blanch’s land. As soon as this land had been secured a new building was erected to the very latest Departmental plan. In the early 1880’s,
following the introduction of compulsory education and the lowering of the limit from 25 to 20 for a Public School, the Department had embarked on the biggest school building program of the nineteenth century and the biggest until the huge growth period after the second world war. Even so, in the early 1880’s the Department could not keep up with the demand for buildings, and at first provided tents to those schools where accommodation was under siege, and later, when the tents proved unsuitable, a cheap wooden building was designed by the Department’s architect for problem areas where speedy erection was essential. Anna bay was not one of these problem areas but it got one of the cheap wooden buildings anyway, more because of its cheapness than for its speed of erection.

The new building, complete in 1884, was generally known as a “beehive”, from the shape of its unusual rounded roof. The walls were constructed of tongue-and-groove boards, set vertically; the curved roof was of corrugated iron. The classroom dimensions were 20 by 16 feet and there was an enclosed verandah which acted as a porch and washroom. Unlike school rooms today, but universal in schools of the period, the floor was stepped, and each of the rows of forms (there were three double rows of forms, 7 feet 6 inches long) was higher than the one in front of it. This was called a gallery and was designed to allow pupils and teachers to see each other more easily. A school of this size cost less than three hundred pounds, including toilets and fencing. Spread over 26 years of existence it cost only about twelve pounds per annum, not including repairs and maintenance, but as the building had little spent on it in 26 years (as we shall see) then it was a cheap investment. Such a building was not lined; the tongue and groove boarding was a single layer only, which was reasonable in a climate like Anna Bay’s yet the same type of unlined building was erected at Kiandra where in mid-winter snow lay piled up several feet deep outside.

With the 1884 “beehive” finally completed there was the question of the old building to attend to. Could it be sold perhaps, for its material? It was finally decided by the Department that it was in such a poor state that the teacher was to use it for firewood, a rather strange decision to take because the building did not belong to the Department; it had been erected by local residents. That the old building could be used for firewood is, I think, further evidence that the old school site was very close to the new school. At this
stage too, an interesting comment was made on Anna Bay itself when Thomas Bowden tried vainly to get a school bell for the new building. He argued that it was necessary to have a bell or the children came late; the inspector agreed that something was needed because “time-pieces in Anna Bay are a rarity”.

Having got a new building, average attendance immediately dropped. Although the school was in no danger of closing, it looked as if it might have to revert to Provisional School status. Instead, and I don not know at whose suggestion, it was decided to work the school on a half-time basis with a similar sized new school at Nelson Bay. Thus, from 1886 until April 1890 these two schools shared the one teacher, who normally taught at one school in the morning and the other in the afternoon, an arrangement which would no doubt be very acceptable to Anna Bay pupils even today. Had it been 15 to 20 years later, instead of the teacher going to the pupils, the pupils would have been conveyed to a central teacher. By 1890 the enrolments at both schools were sufficient to warrant a full-time teacher.

Having given away a building for firewood which did not belong to it, the Department made another strange decision in 1889. The matter concerned the use of the 1884 building for divine service on Sundays by the Wesleyan minister. A petition of some 50 residents of Anna Bay asked the Minister for Education for the necessary permission to use the school. Residents must have been unaware that it had been a long-standing policy of 40 years not to allow religious bodies to use government school buildings because of the possibility of controversy within the community. By rule Anna Bay residents should have received a speedy but polite refusal of their request. Instead, the inspector noted on the petition, as he forwarded it to head office in Sydney that the school was not owned by the Department. At head office a senior officer noted that the school was not on a Departmental site and soon after the Under-Secretary gave permission for the “prayer of the petitioners to be acceded to”. Of course, we know that the building and the land were the property of the Department, the land having been crown land acquired in 1884 and the building erected at Departmental expense the same year. This made Anna Bay unique perhaps, in having church services in the government school building, with the expressed authorisation of the Department.
The 1890's

The 1890’s for Anna Bay school got off to a good start. From May that year the school no longer shared the services of the teacher, Walter Weiss, with Nelson Bay. Nelson Bay had its own teacher appointed to it and Anna Bay received all of Weiss’ attentions.

This good start was only moderately affected by the economic depression of the early 1890’s. Weiss’ salary was cut, there was a general tightening of the belt but there was little of unemployment and hard times which were typical of the more heavily populated areas, especially the coal towns of the Hunter Valley. School maintenance funds and building programs were cut but again this did not affect Anna Bay whose school building was only ten years old and did not require additions.

The school however, was not the only thing which was receiving Walter Weiss’ attention. Young Amy Blanch (one of the first pupils of the school in 1879) now a sweet eligible 20 year old, had caught Weiss’ eye and the two were married in 1893. They rented a house, got some furniture together and as newlyweds settled down to live happily ever after. Amy was a member of the largest family grouping in Anna Bay and because of the inter-marrying which had taken place, she was related to a good many more. Weiss automatically became uncle, son-in-law, cousin and so on to these same relations. Was this good? I would have thought so but the local inspector of schools did not. Upon discovering that Weiss was now related to almost every pupil in the school, the inspector recommended his transfer to another district on the grounds that discipline in the school would be impossible for Weiss to maintain, and that community and school affairs must suffer. There was no evidence of this but the Department appointed Weiss to Glendon Brook nevertheless. Weiss appealed against such a move; his father, the teacher at Hartley, also appealed on his son’s behalf, but to no avail.

Finally in the 1890’s the name of the school was changed in 1896 from Hannah Bay to Anna Bay in conformity with an official change in the name of the post office. To adopt Anna Bay would obviate postal problems, but it would also mean adopting a name which even in the 1880s had come into general use.”

- J Fletcher.
Mr Fletcher is correct in assuming that the 1884 site was opposite the earlier site. The original slab structure was near the site of the present Union Church, on the northern side of the road, while the buildings of 1884 and 1910 were erected on the opposite side of the road.

The Parading Ground School referred to was located at Williamstown.

Although the 1889 petition for permission to use the school for divine service was signed by 51 residents, 11 of these apparently lived in Nelson Bay, including W H Glover and Mrs Laman. Mrs Cecilia Banks and Miss Sarah Banks gave their address as “Wallace Farm”. The remainder were residents of Anna Bay and Bobs Farm.

Mrs Suzannah Asquith, 93, recalls incidents of the 1890s: “I remember the inspector coming each year. We swept and scrubbed out the school”

Although the “beehive” was an economy building, Mr Fred Blanch (94) recalls that it was a “decent little school”. He remembers that Mr Emery, who boarded at his home, “loved to plough wit the bullocks, and he wasn’t bad at it either—for a schoolteacher”.

Mr Emery later married, but having no doubt noted the reason for the transfer of his predecessor, he did not choose a local lass.

Unfortunately, the early register of pupils’ names has not survived, but a study of other records of the period reveals names such as Eagleton, Anderson and Bagnall as amongst those of the pioneers.
One such record is a list of workers who, in 1897, dug the drain from Murrumburrimbah (Anna Bay) Swamp to Tilligerry Creek, thus making more fertile soil available for agriculture (the drain as extended in later years).

**Men Who Worked on the Construction of the Big Drain at Anna bay in the Year 1896:**

- Chas Anderson (103 days)
- Joseph Bagnall (102 days)
- Lee Begnall (98 days)
- Henry Blanch (100 days, including 23 days with a horse)
- J Johns (92 days)
- Harry Blanch (with bullocks for 26 days)
- William Hollis (11 days including three days with a horse)
- Frank Banks (12 days)
- Mrs James Robinson (sponsor – two men for 50 days)
- Harry Miller (50 days)
George Robinson (34 days)

Charlie Blanch (42 days)

W S Blanch (98 days, including 23 days with a horse)

Alfred J Blanch (99 days)

W Eagleton (48 days)

Other men who worked on the construction intermittently are as follows:

Albert Bagnall, Joe Blanch, Herb Blanch, Sam Bagnall, William Blanch, AB Blanch, Turner W Bagets, C Eagleton.

By 1897 the settlers of the district had become numerous and enthusiastic enough to form a cricket club, the foundation members of which were:

D Diemar, J Cameron, E Macpherson (not related to Grannie), H Miller, S Thompson, C Diemar, P Bagnall, L Bagnall, Joe Blanch, Archie Blanch, Bert Blanch, Alf Blanch, Mark Blanch, A H Blanch, N Cromarty, D Cromarty, C Keel, C Upton, M Upton, JJ Emery, J
Johns. (Both of these records were supplied by Mr Cliff Blanch who left Anna Bay with his parents, Harry and Jessie in 1907 to live near Gloucester.)

Another well-known name to enter our history in this period is that of Mrs Frances McPherson, mother of Mrs Suzannah Asquith. Mrs McPherson became district nurse and midwife, and as such was affectionately known to generations of Anna Bay folk as “Grannie Mac”. She made her home firstly some distance to the north of the present school, and later just to the west of our school building, her house facing the old main road. Grannie Mac became a legend, not only because of her nursing skill, but also because of her alleged great age, and her fame spread. Retired fisherman, Mr Bernie Thompson of Nelson Bay says, “Even when I was a boy, we said that Grannie Mac was as old as Big Hill.” In fact she was 89 when she died in 1945.

Before we leave the early years, one other item of note needs to be recorded. Having obtained a school, the residents of Anna Bay led by Mr & Mrs Alfred Blanch, set themselves to gain another symbol of progress – a post office. They were partly
successful in this on 15 January 1895 when a receiving office was established at Hannah Bay in the charge of Alfred Blanch with two deliveries a week, Alfred’s salary was 5 pounds per annum! Its name was changed to Anna Bay in 1896, and Mrs Selina Blanch took charge in April 1897 on the death of her husband. The service must have been well patronised for the office was raised to the status of a post office on the first day of the new century. In 1905, because of the efforts of the Progress Committee, a telephone service was established, and Mrs Blanch’s salary was 20 pounds per annum. The service rendered by Mrs Blanch was comprehensive, telegrams being delivered at any hour, and this was greatly appreciated by residents. Mr Steve Blanch was the mailman.

4 THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Mr Fletcher’s history continues:

After the flag waving and pomp and ceremony associated with the celebration of Federation there followed a period of mourning for the Queen who had been monarch for much longer than Anna Bay
school, or for that matter the settlement of Anna Bay, had been in existence. The new century would not otherwise change Anna Bay except slowly.

By 1907 there was a growing dissatisfaction with the school building. It was large enough, but the lack of maintenance during and after the 1890’s depression had allowed white-ants to gain a footing in (or perhaps we should say to get their teeth into) the timber of the school. The Progress Association which acted as a parents and citizens association condemned what it regarded as dangerous and dilapidated condition of the building on numerous occasions. Even the assistant architect of public schools in Newcastle considered the building almost totally destroyed by the action of the white-ants.

At first the Department considered repairing the old 1884 building but the cost would have equalled or even exceeded the cost of a new building. So a new building it was to be. In early 1910, having heard the good news, the Progress Association urged the Department to build a school which would accommodate 50 to 60 pupils. Anna Bay residents, typical of most town folk, were expecting that rapid growth which was always about to happen. The inspector however, could only find 21 pupils on the roll and about 27 all told in the area and if one counted children under 5 and over 14. Nor could he see the golden age of rapid growth and prosperity around the bend. He thought that a school room to seat 25 would be ample for Anna Bay’s future needs; if unexpectedly more pupils arrived the school could be extended.

The new building was erected in 1910 and though it had a conventional hipped roof, its inside dimensions and layout were little different to the 1884 building. it was 21 feet square with a verandah; the lighting inside was certainly an improvement and the floor was flat rather than tiered. None of the new dual-desks were provided and Anna Bay continued with the long desks and forms, which had come from the old Parading Ground school, for at least another 30 years. It is not certain when the old long desks finally were replaced. The remains of the 1884 building, which had to be demolished to make way for the new 1910 building, were used by the teacher to make a rough shed. One presumes that the ant-eaten parts went up in flames as its predecessor’s parts had done.
A Little Growth

At this time settlement was continuing to develop several miles to the west of the school, in the area known as Lower Anna Bay or Bobs Farm. The children from this area attended Anna Bay until there were sufficient of them for a small Provisional School to be established at Bobs Farm in 1918. This relieved some of the growing pressure on accommodation at Anna Bay. But this was only temporary. The long awaited “boom” began occurring in the 1920’s with the advent of the motor car in growing numbers. The track which had wound down to he point and which had been given the courtesy title of a government road was upgraded to “main roads” status, allowing through traffic from Newcastle to Nelson Bay. The motor car and tourism went hand in hand. There were moves to erect a Union Church in Anna Bay, next to the school, on part of the land set aside as school reserve for pupils’ horses. Mrs S Blanch offered to rent her house to the next teacher and the Department responded by promising to appoint a married man.

- J Fletcher

Just prior to the beginning of the new century, Mr William Rae was appointed to the school. He remained for 15 years, a term of service exceeded only by that of Mr Loftus Chalmers in recent years. Although he no doubt drilled the “3R’s” religiously, Mr Rae also seems to have had an interest in ‘history’ and ‘geography’. “He always asked new pupils where the sun rose and what direction the wind came from” says Tom Eagleton. The pupils studied local history, as this composition, which has survived almost intact, testifies:

HISTORY OF ANNA BAY, 1826 TO 1907

The first inhabited place around this district was Soldier’s Point, it was a fortified point to prevent convicts escaping from Midde Island. After the cessation of convicts, Captain Cromarty built a retiring residence there, where he was afterwards drowned. M Cromarty, his son,
selected a farm which he called “Bob’s Farm” and this was the first farm at Anna Bay. After him came Mr Hart and Messrs Upton. Then Mr John Blanch senior laid out a vineyard at Morna Point. For the first few years the vines did well, but after that they got a disease and died out. After this Mr John Blanch Junior started the first farm on the swamp.

The first school was built about the year 1881. It was constructed of rough split slabs with a stringy bark roof. In one end was a fireplace and in the other a little room in which the teacher (Mr Holmes) used to batch. The desks and seats were brought by Mr Cromarty in a boat from a school at Salt Ash, and some of the desks and seats still remain in the present school. The first school erected was on a green hillock on the opposite side of the road to the present school. At this time the district was mostly inhabited by blacks who were very agreeable to the setters, but most of them kept towards the sea. It is said that frequently a dead whale would be washed ashore and the blacks would gather together to cut it up and roast it, but they mostly lived on fish, cockles, honey, native bears and opposums. One of the old Native Kings was called “No Nosed Tommy” who kept his tribe toward the north of Mrs Cromarty’s paddock and who got part of their clothes and rations there. Then the place was opened up more and a new school was built which stands to this day. At one time this place was called Hannah Bay, but when the first post office was opened, they changed the name to Anna Bay. At first it was bi-weekly mail service, but in 1899 the bi-weekly mail service was exchanged for a tri-weekly mail service. Then in 1905 owing to the efforts of the Progress Committee a Telephone Office was established, which proves a great boon to the community. A public hall was also erected in 1906, which is used as a place of worship, as well as for socials, concerts and other purposes. A deviation is now being made in the road leading to Stockton which when completed will be a great benefit to the residents of Anna Bay ________ farmers and fishermen. The total population now is about 120.
Young Joe was 13 or 14 at the time.

William Rae appears in several surviving photographs, including one of a picnic group of nearly 100 people – most of the population of the district. Like most citizens, he no doubt participated in most community activities, for the people of this isolated settlement had to make their own entertainment.

“He was a good sportsman”, recalls Mr Rendall Upton. When the “Legion of Frontiersmen”, a volunteer cavalry unit was formed in Anna Bay in the beginning of World War I, Mr Rae became corporal and Mr Donald Cromarty, lieutenant. Some of the volunteers later joined the regular forces.

Predictably, the men of Anna Bay were good horsemen. Races had been held along the beach, even in earlier days, for Alf Blanch died tragically, apparently of a heart attack, in a race in 1897. However, in the 1900’s they appear to have been more organised. Riders came from Nelson Bay and Williamtown to compete for bridles, whips and spurs, all supplied by saddler Rowley Hill of Williamtown. Small bets were made – some very small. “I remember two pretty tight old fellows from Williamtown who bet threepence each”, laughs Tom Eagleton. Ladies, of course, were not invited, with the exception of one old lady who served excellent meals in a bush house on Grassy Hill – roast, vegetables and generous portions cut from a huge pudding for one shilling!

By way of consolation, the ladies had their tennis club, and a sailing club existed at Soldiers Point, though no doubt sailing was more of a gentleman’s sport in those days.

Cricket was played where the Pony Club course is today and Fred Blanch believes the standard was higher than at present. “Lee Bagnall was very fast and could break the ball both
ways. He was better than Ray Robinson, who played in England”. A concrete pitch was later built at Cemetery Point.

Mr Frances Goodman, Rae’s successor, was here for only a few months before he enlisted. Mr Magnus Cromarty remembers that he read stories to the children on the last day before he went to war.

Probably because of the ‘manpower shortage’ during and after that ‘worst of all wars’, the next seven appointees were ladies, and together they remained only eight years. The reasons for this are not difficult to imagine – few single ladies would relish a long term in such an isolated school to which transport facilities were so poor. Miss Bowditch, however, was a ‘live wire’ and stayed for two years. Mrs Kath Cromarty recalls that she arranged elaborate peace celebrations, and at the end of 1917 took all the children to see the opening of the new iceworks and fish packing centre at Pindimar. An excursion to be remembered by the pupils, but unfortunately for Port Stephens, the venture was not a success, and the plant closed in the early 1930’s.

In Miss Bowditch’s time also, a mine, believed to have been laid near Gabo Island by the raider “Wolf”, was washed up on Stockton Beach. The children were taken to see the mine, Mrs Cromarty remembers. Later, two experts came from Sydney to explode it. Tom Eagleton saw one chalk a spike – “He didn’t rub it very hard, either!” – stand back over 300 yards, fire at it with a rifle, and explode it with a second shot. A piece of hot metal landed near Tom, and small pieces were later found in the Morna Point Cemetery, 2 miles away. Eleven horses were ridden into the resulting hole in the sand!

Mr Fletcher seems a little in advance of events when he states that the track to Nelson Bay was upgraded to “main road” status in the twenties. Indeed, many locals maintain that it has not yet reached that exalted standard!

transport on the peninsula has always been difficult, because of the sandy soil, swamps and thick scrub. The earliest settlers travelled mainly by boat, and later vessels such as the “Karuah”
carried goods to and from Port Stephens for many years, penetrating upstream to “The Branch”.

Sizeable vessels, such as the paddle steamers “Newcastle” and “Namoi”, conveyed day visitors to Nelson Bay late last century and in the early 1900’s.

To reach Anna Bay most horsemen followed the example of pioneer John Blanch, and rode up Stockton Beach. by the early 1900’s coaches conveyed passengers from the Stockton ferry to Sal Ash, where they could board the launch “Replica” for Nelson Bay. The road to Anna Bay was gradually improved. The deviation mentioned in Joe Robinson’s 1907 composition was the Marsh Road, completed about that time, replacing the earlier track through the sandhills. By around 1925 the road was formed to the Soldier’s Point junction, and to the Boat Harbour turn-off four years later. Nelson Bay drivers continued along a variety of sand tracks to Dutchman’s Beach. Mr Neville Blanch remembers crossing “Blackfellow’s Drains” and “Polly’s Swamp”, and Mr Jim West was the first paid driver for brothers Arch and Harry Blanch who from about 1926 operated a service car from Newcastle to Nelson Bay, using firstly a 5-seater Overland, then a 9-seater Studebaker, and later a charabanc glorying in the name “Yellow Peril”. Thurlows ran the steamer “Reliance” from Salt Ash to villages on the port, and after it was burnt, Korsman Bros operated the “Holly”, “Cambawarra” and “Yoothapoona”.

The condition of the road did not impress a Sydney Herald reporter en route to the Wallamba wreck in 1923. Forced to forsake his car by a ‘sticky morass’ he continued by dray which ‘plunged in and out of deep ruts’, then by sulky and saddle pony to Morna Point.

Early in the century, Anna Bay farmers used horses and carts to take their vegetables to Newcastle. Cream from dairy farms, which were mainly around Bob’s Farm, was carted to Salt Ash to meet the dairy wagons. Fred Blanch had two vans – “Lew Crawley drove one” – and after crossing on the early punt, he sold his vegetables on the wharves, mainly to ships’ chandlers. In 1923, Mr Alf Blanch bought a new Rugby light truck and began carrying for Anna Bay farmers. “We carried 13 bags of beans in that little truck, and then another 13 in the afternoon”, recalls
Fred. The Rugby was too small, and was replaced by a Mason, then an International with solid tyres.

During World War I, proposals to establish a large naval base at Salamander Bay were advanced, and a railway line to link it with Thornton was surveyed. With peace, the plan was shelved, and so the port retained its peaceful beauty for some time longer.

Most of the facilities we now take for granted were either non-existent or far distant from Anna Bay early in the century. Major purchases were made in Raymond Terrace or Newcastle, a day’s journey being involved. There was no resident doctor to supplement Grannie Mac’s ministrations, but Dr Meredith from Raymond Terrace attended urgent cases. “He was a bosker bloke and a good rider, even though he was about 14 stone”, recalls Fred Blanch.

The Union Church mentioned by Mr Fletcher was completed in March 1931 – almost on the sit of the original slab and bank school – and was used by Anglican, Methodist, Free Presbyterian and later, Lutheran congregations.

Holiday fishermen began to visit the area, particularly miners from the coalfields, and many camped at Morna Point.

5 DEPRESSION AND WAR

Mr Fletcher concludes:

At this time (1927) the Parents and Citizens Association appear in the records for the first time asking for the school to be resited so as to make it more central to the bulk of the population. (The P&C Association may have been in existence earlier without having corresponded with the Department of Education). Had there been unanimity among residents about the need to relocate the school, the Department would almost certainly have agreed. But it was soon apparent that several families (not the Blanchs) had captured control of the P&C
Association and wanted the school moved closer to their properties. There was nothing unique about this: communities throughout New South Wales had for decades often been divided as to whether the school should be located on this or that side of the creek, or the railway line, or next to whose property or at one end of town rather than the other. And of course such squabbles still go on, only these days they are thinly disguised beneath an acquired sophistication. In the case of Anna Bay the Department decided that at least for the moment most of the development was occurring at the growing resort of Nelson Bay and that this was adequately catered for by Nelson Bay Public School. Nevertheless, the enrolment had risen to 46 at Anna Bay, not quite enough yet for another teacher, but as far as I can tell, the school still consisted only of the 21 foot square 1910 building with no additions. Accommodation must have been tight.

The 1910 building only just survived complete destruction during particularly fierce bushfires in 1933. The boy’s toilets were destroyed along with some of the school fences, but the dogged persistence of the teacher and Messrs S Blanch, M Blanch, L Blanch and W Smith saved the remaining buildings being razed.

In 1935 some 30 years after the Department of Education had decided to gradually replace all the long desks and forms with dual desks which were more comfortable, better for posture, and easier to move in and out of, Anna Bay school was still using the old long desks. Despite requests from the teacher, who complained of the disruption pupils caused each other clambering out of the long desks to have their work marked at the teacher’s table, and the difficulty of keeping the desks screwed down tightly enough to prevent any movement during writing periods, the Department let the matter stand over. Perhaps these desks were still there after the war?

- J Fletcher
The earliest register of pupils which has survived begins in 1927, and names, now well-known, appear amongst the pioneers – names like Pitstock, Richardson, Gordon, Pain, Smith, Mitchell, Skilton. Parents were mainly farmers, with a sparse sprinkling of oystermen and fishermen. Children left the school at 14 or 15, usually to follow in their parent’s footsteps. Anna Bay remained a typical farming community.

The depression of the 1930’s was probably felt rather more than that of the 1890’s, but was not as severe as in the industrial towns. Ted Cunningham built the first shanty at Boat Harbour.

Gradually the world recovered, and more pupils left the school to seek some kind of secondary education. Then, in the war years, the word “evacuated” appears in the register.

Port Stephens, as a natural deep-water harbour, was used by the Australian, American and English navies. The coastline near Anna Bay was guarded by two infantry battalions and “old soldiers” were recalled to man the 25-pounders. The 2/2 Field Regiment was camped on Anna Bay “paddock” for a time. Civilians could not enter the area without a permit and plans were formulated for evacuation in the event of attack. Some children were evacuated to safer areas, but for most, school continued at Anna Bay. Teacher Roy Ford was a keen fisherman, and Magnus Cromarty remembers a shell fired by “friendly” troops landing close to them while they were returning from fishing. Bill Richardson, son of one of the early fishermen of Boat Harbour says, “We kids liked to see Whooosh coming down the road. He and Mr Ford talked fishing and we sometimes got some extra play.”

Roads were upgraded rapidly, and a new road was built through the sandhills to supplement the low Marsh Road – and actually it followed the original track quite closely. Anna Bay was bypassed by a more direct route to Nelson Bay, although the old “loop road” (Gan Gan Road) is well used to this day. Mr Frank Motum, who operated the bus service, began the war with a charabanc and ended it with four buses. Mr Amos Fogg later expanded the service, and
daily travel to Newcastle became feasible. Tourism expanded, though still centred mainly in Nelson Bay.

After the war, Mr Jack Merritt fitted up his mobile store which was to serve Anna Bay well for 32 years.

Gradually, the area now known as Birubi Point began to develop. It had been subdivided in 1925 by Mr Jim Davison, and taken over in 1935 by Mr Henry Halloran who owned a number of areas of land around Port Stephens. In the early 1950’s a number of ‘new’ and ‘old’ Australians chose to make their homes there and began a demand for building blocks which has continued ever since.

In the twenties, Mrs Grace Robinson, wife of Joe, became the district nurse, although “Grannie Mac” continued for some years her duties as midwife. Mrs Robinson is remembered with much gratitude, and Mrs Eve Ross, her daughter, recalls her mother assisting Dr Meredith with an operation on the kitchen table. In the early 1950’s the first resident doctor arrived in Nelson Bay and the Community Hospital was begun in one of the wartime buildings soon after.

The school grew steadily after the war, thus avoiding the fate of many small country schools – closure, with pupils being conveyed to larger centres nearby.

In 1951 Mr Alfred Diemar, a native of the district, organised a tree-planting ceremony in association with a “Back to Anna Bay” function. Soon pupil numbers demanded a second teacher, and Mr Diemar later transferred. It was the end of an era – the ‘one teacher school’ at Anna Bay was no more.

6 EXPANSION

Increasing enrolments in the early 1950’s caused the Department of Education to reclassify the school and appoint a “principal”. All previous teachers had been ‘teacher-in-charge’. Mr L N
Chalmers accepted the position, and retained it for 22 years, the record period of service to the school. It was a period of great progress and achievement, much appreciated by the citizens of Anna Bay. As one ex-pupil states, “Lofty Chalmers was Anna Bay School”.

The history prepared by Mr Fletcher does not cover this era, but we are fortunate in that Mr Chalmers chose to retire in the district and has favoured us by committing some of his memories to paper. Mr Chalmers writes:

**BRIEF HISTORY OF ANNA BAY PUBLIC SCHOOL 1954-1975 by L N Chalmers**

Due to the death of my father, I was unable to report to the Anna Bay School until the Tuesday morning, the first day of the New School Year in 1954.

I discovered a brand new room adjoining the old building and a multitude of wooden crates containing new furniture stacked on the verandah. Unfortunately however, there wasn’t any door key to the new room nor did inquiries and scrounging of keys from nearby residents help solve the problem. Area Office was contacted and resulted in a key being delivered on the following afternoon. However, by the time the furniture was uncrated and arranged the third day of the term had drawn to a close. So you may well imagine that my introduction to my assistant, Mrs E M Banks and the seventy pupils of Anna Bay was rather hectic if not entirely chaotic. Having finally established some order, the school life at Anna Bay proceeded normally for the next two or three years.

Probably the major change in that period was the introduction of a school uniform. On my arrival the children dressed as they wished and were mainly bare-footed. Thanks to the co-operation of the P&C and the parents generally, within twelve months practically all the children attending the school wore footwear and the school uniform.
The P&C Association during this period was quite active, but to increase the number attending the monthly meeting a Combined Progress and Association meeting was held. Mr Joseph Robinson was President and the dominant figure during these particular years. By the end of 1956 the enrolment had increased to 90, but when I applied for an extra teacher I was blithely told by Mr Inspector Astle, that I would need a class load of at least 45 before an extra teacher was appointed. Finally a teacher was appointed and a class was established in the body of the church across the road. One of the distractions at this time, although spectacular and interesting, was the regular bombing and gunnery practice by the RAAF planes at Birubi Point. They invariably made their approach to the target over the school, and it was not unusual to have clips fall in the surrounds or bomb splinters cut through the tops of the trees.

A survey indicated that the school enrolment would continue to increase, so Mr Inspector Clem Hardy decided that it would be advisable to establish a new school in the district. This original idea was to leave a two teacher school at the present site and establish another two teacher school on a site the Department had acquired opposite Mr Alf Bennett’s. I disagreed with this, maintaining it would be detrimental to the district and children to split the school. The P&C unanimously agreed with me. So Mr Inspector Hardy called a Public Meeting where three proposals were discussed:

1. One large school on the new site
2. Two smaller schools
3. Commute to Nelson Bay as a Central School

The people of Anna Bay did not hesitate to vote for the one large school, although the site generated considerable discussion. Finally it was agreed that the new school should be built on 5 acres of land newly acquired. It is interesting to note that the Department paid Mr Alf Bennett and Mr Tom Eagleton sixty-two pounds ($124) each for the 2-1/2 acres of land it purchased from them.
The tender for the new school was let to McKenzie Bros of Maitland. The Inspector and I spent considerable time selecting and marking all the trees that would be left.

In order to save confusion the new school was designated as Anna Bay East – in fact, that was the name placed on the new school – this name played a very important part in the allocation of equipment. As a new school, it was entitled to $400 of library books and various valuable items such as a piano, projectors, typewriters, files, as well as general equipment. Consequently when the new school was finally opened in 1960 it was very well equipped. This name confusion continued for almost two years. I received two of all correspondence forms etc. Finally the Department straightened the matter out, reprimanding me mildly for causing the confusion and getting equipment under false pretences. The school was once again Anna Bay Public School. The period before and during the transfer to the new site, caused some inconvenience; however, on the whole it went off quite smoothly, considering that one of the classrooms had to be transferred and incorporated in the new building.

On 11 March 1961 the new building was officially opened by the Director of Education, Mr W A Gelfius. It was quite an important occasion during which the children and the P&C took quite an active part, entertaining the important guests such as Mr Fitzgerald MLA, the architects, supervisors and builders.

The new building was quite comfortable, however it did not have a Principal’s Office and I, with the help of the P&C curtained off the bookshelves and made the store room behind the Staff Room into an office.

The playground, although large, was very handy, and covered in a multitude of bracken fern, so not only did we herd the children from one section of the playground to another at set intervals in order to prevent excessive wear in a particular area, but we also insisted each pupil pull 20 ferns before they were permitted to play after eating their lunch!
The playground presented another obstacle in the fact that it did not have a flat area for sporting events, consequently the P&C persuaded the Department to share the cost of having a suitable area bulldozed into a playing field. Mr Dan Carroll did this job efficiently for $400. Thanks to the P&C water was laid on through the playground, seed was sown and the grown fertilised with the result the sandy waste was quickly transformed into an attractive grassy area. Mr Alf Bennett and his son Allyn, smoothed out the sports field and regularly fertilised it with fowl manure, so it was not long before it was in constant use. The enrolment gradually increased and another room became necessary, however, as the wheels of officialdom turn slowly, I was forced to have the P&C enclose a section of the verandah which was used as a small classroom.

Finally in 1963 and extra Kindergarten Staff and Store Room, as well as further toilet facilities were constructed by the Public Works Department.

This accommodation remained sufficient although the enrolment reached 147 (1965) at one stage. However it declined again and during my time, levelled out at an average of 130 with a staff of four teachers.

At the end of 1963 I took nine months long service leave, and embarked on a tour of the United Kingdom and Europe. During my absence, Mr K Fitzgerald acted as Principal. I resumed duty following the September holidays 1964.

The only major operation over the next few years was a further levelling of the Sports area, and the laying of a concrete slab for ball games. The rutile company assisted greatly in this project by seeding and fertilising the basketball area.

While the enrolments of the District schools remained small, the Annual Combined District PSAAA Sports enjoyed quite a Picnic Day atmosphere. All the pupils of each school participated in the straight and novelty events, while the parents stopped work for the day to excitedly cheer their children ‘on’. During this period the Anna Bay Athletes (neatly decked out in sports uniform) had their share of success in the small school section.
Unfortunately as the enrolments of each school increased, the number of entrants and events had to be limited, and the Port Stephens District lost a very enjoyable annual event.

When I first took charge of the Anna Bay School, the Department refused to employ a part-time sewing teacher, and Mrs Banks had to perform the task. After considerable correspondence and an increase in enrolment, permission to employ a sewing teacher was granted. Mrs Daphne Pitstock filled the position until we moved to the new school, then Mrs June Fenwick and Mrs Eve Ross acted in that capacity until my retirement.

Once again I was fortunate to have cleaners employed in the school. In the old school Mrs Anderson carried out the duty whilst in the new school Mr Daphne Pitstock performed the duty for many years until she left the district, when Mrs H Low ‘took over’. Each one of these took a great pride in the cleanliness and general condition of the school. When special visitors such as the Inspector, came to the school, he was greeted with vases of flowers and even cakes for morning tea! - all supplied by the cleaner. Each one of them was truly a member of staff.

As mentioned earlier, the Anna Bay P&C Association, although small in members, has always been quite an active body under the guidance and management of such Presidents as Mr George Pain, Mrs Mim Pitstock and Mr Noel Gordon; Secretaries Mrs Helen Wade, Mrs Elsie Gordon and Mrs Gladys Smith; Treasurer Mrs Iris Moore. So enthusiastic and keen were these officers that the school never really lacked for the necessary finance to make it one of the best equipped schools in the district. It was amazing how the whole district would rally when a fate was held. My relations with the members of the P&C were always most harmonious and I must thank them for making my stay in Anna Bay so enjoyable.

During the period when Federal Government finance began to flow more freely into the Education system, quite some radical changes took place at Anna Bay. Firstly, the large grants permitted the purchase of more elaborate equipment and library books, which assisted greatly in the implementation of the group and open classroom methods of teaching.
A part-time Secretary, Mrs Joan Southern, was appointed. After a period of adjustment she became a great asset to the school, not only as a secretary, but through her application of her musical talents.

A male cleaner, Mr Tom Pollock, was employed for several hours each afternoon. Despite Tom’s age he worked like a Trojan and became the general handyman. Nothing was too big or too small for him to fix!

Many former pupils of Anna Bay have distinguished themselves both academically and in the field of leadership. We find among them doctors, engineers, teachers and skilled tradesmen, which both boys and girls have been selected as prefects and captains of other schools such as Nelson Bay and Raymond Terrace High Schools.

Finally, the staff I had during the 22 years at Anna Bay were exceptional – friendly, co-operative and loyal people who made my life at Anna Bay an easy and happy one. Unfortunately I cannot name them all, for many only remained for a short period.

I must mention Mr Joe Palagy, who, in the last few years of my term at Anna Bay, acted as unofficial Deputy, and relieved me of so many organisational and disciplinary problems. Other teachers who remain in my memory and gave me long and faithful service were: Mrs Enid Banks, Mrs Colleen Roach, Mrs Sybil Palmer, Mr Gordon Lee, Mrs Dawn Tawse, Mrs Jenny Halpin, Mrs Olwyn Marten, Miss Sue Moss, Mr Ken Lang, Mr Vic Stanton, Miss Elizabeth Richardson, Miss Wendy Barnes, Miss Jenny Hurts, Mr Ken McCray, Mrs Elaine Tuesley and Miss Sue Wilton.

- L N Chalmers

With the opening of the Nelson Bay Central School in 1957, secondary education was available in the district for the first time. In 1974, the central school became Nelson Bay High and facilities were expanded to provide for complete secondary education.
Since the retirement of Mr Chalmers, steady progress has continued at Anna Bay. Although enrolments have not increased markedly, a reduction in class sizes brought a metal ‘demountable’ classroom.

The school has continued to reflect social changes, the most notable of which is the increasing mobility of many families. As late as 1970 new enrolments at the school were very largely children of local families, beginning their school careers. In 1978 two-thirds of new enrolments came from other schools and a similar number of pupils left the school. The further development of caravan parks in the area will probably accelerate this trend. Recently, neighbouring schools on the peninsula have experienced dramatic increased in enrolment. Might we, like the citizens of 1910, expect ‘rapid growth’?

Anna Bay has of course reaped the benefits of state-wide advances in education. Smaller classes permit more individual attention, and counselling services have improved. We have had services of a library clerical assistant for some time and this year a teacher librarian was appointed, teaching for one day per week. Unfortunately we have no centralised library, and book stocks are inadequate – hence our Centenary Library Project.

However, it must be appreciated that the modern school is a much more complex organization than the school of yesteryear. Staffs are now expected to develop their own curricula, and many administrative functions have been decentralised to the school level.

Discontinuation of the direct federal funding so appreciated by Mr Chalmers has re-emphasised the fundraising functions of the P&C Association and the 1977 fete raised a record $1600.

As Anna Bay Public School enters its second century, it is appropriate that we cast our minds back to Alfred Holmes and his 26 pupils in the slab-and-bark school on its grassy knoll. Since that time man has experienced the era of most significant and rapid change in his history, but have basic human values changed so much after all?
## APPENDIX A

### ANNA BAY PUBLIC SCHOOL

#### HEAD TEACHERS 1879-1979

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Appointed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alfred Holmes</td>
<td>11.1879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Blackwood</td>
<td>5.1882</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Bowden</td>
<td>3.1883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Thompson</td>
<td>11.1884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter Weiss</td>
<td>1.1889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Emery</td>
<td>1.1894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Rae</td>
<td>10.1899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francis Goodman</td>
<td>1.1916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bessie O’Brien</td>
<td>3.1916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte Bowditch</td>
<td>12.1917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janet Smith</td>
<td>1.1920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eliza McNeil</td>
<td>6.1920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beatrice Anderson</td>
<td>1.1923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Holohan</td>
<td>4.1923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beatrice Samuels</td>
<td>3.1924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norman McLaren</td>
<td>12.1924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarence Selden</td>
<td>2.1927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James English</td>
<td>5.1928</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

ANNA BAY PUBLIC SCHOOL

ENROLMENTS AND AVERAGE ATTENDANCE 1879-1904

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Enrolments</th>
<th>Average Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1879</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Enrolments from 1905 to 1950 are not available; those from 1955 have been given in five year intervals.