

SCHOOL ON THE HILL

A Brief Account Of The First 50 Years Of Grant's Braes School

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

This little history has been a pleasure to produce because of my long association with Grant's Braes School. My daughter and my grandchildren are past pupils, I saw service on the School Committee years ago, and I have lived next to the school for some 35 years. As a neighbour one becomes aware of the way the school is run and of the morale of those who attend. I can say with confidence that the school has never been in better heart and that its students have never been happier than they are at this time. Long may it continue.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF GRANT'S BRAES SCHOOL

The Beginning

Grant's Braes School opened its doors on February 1, 1950. It was an important occasion for the community because Waverley was still sparsely populated. It had a semi-rural feel, gravel roads, an indifferent bus service and no sewerage system. There was a store, long gone, on Larnach Road, diagonally opposite the south-west corner of the school grounds. This was the social centre. The garage, pharmacy, dairy, medical centre and other facilities came more than 20 years later. Most children attended Andersons Bay School, some on foot, some transported by parents. This was an unsatisfactory state of affairs and the Waverley Ratepayers' Association, a lively body which had two converted army huts as headquarters, agitated for several years to have a school built. Leading the charge was R.A. Wilkie, a prominent resident and successful businessman. He became one of the first school commissioners, along with J.A. Pearce, C.D. Scott and (a little later) Kendal Nisbet.

The school was built on land which was once part of Grant's Braes farm, established in 1849 by the pioneering Burns family. By chance, the first headmaster also bore the name of Grant. He was Gordon Grant, an able teacher and son of a celebrated school principal. Gordon Grant and his two assistant teachers moved into a three classroom school which was not quite finished, with rough grounds, bucket toilets emptied on Friday nights by a "night soil contractor", but enough desks and chairs for the first 70 pupils. There was a small staffroom to which Grant himself brought a table and chairs. The Otago Education Board provided a sofa and H.E. Shacklock Ltd., (prompted by Wilkie) gave a hot plate. There was no telephone for the first five months and no typewriter. Official letters were written in longhand by the headmaster, then taken to town by the indefatigable Wilkie to be typed by his secretary. One of the first purchases authorised by the commissioners, who were responsible for the school until a committee was elected, was a duplicator. It was much used by the teachers but had nothing but handwritten copy to reproduce for a very long time. Another action of the commissioners was the appointment of a part-time cleaner. She was quickly replaced by a man because one of the duties required was manual stoking of the coal-burning boiler.

As well as the grounds (on several levels) adjoining the school building there was an additional playing field on the other side of Belford Street. This was simply an unfenced paddock which belonged to the Education Board and was allocated to Grant's Braes School. The Board was slow to make any improvements to the grounds but one matter which received instant attention was the delivery of the milk ration. The Government decreed that every primary school child should be given a small bottle of milk every day. Bottles with cardboard tops (and half an inch of cream) were delivered in crates and distributed each morning. Warm full-cream milk was by

no means popular but children were expected to drink it. Some ingenuity was shown by the School Committee when winter arrived. They decided to serve cocoa to the youngsters at the lunch time. There was no need to spend money on milk, and the cocoa proved much more popular than the drink provided by a benevolent State.

At a public meeting in May the first School Committee was elected. Predictably, R.A. Wilkie became the first chairman. He was supported by three men and one woman. When the Home & School Association was formed a few weeks later there were 108 residents at the meeting. Seven men and three women were elected to the committee – a gender balance typical of the time but somewhat altered as the years went by. Even before the association was formed a group of residents had raised £70 for school use. A further £50 came from a bring-and-buy, the first of many Home & School fundraising efforts.

Priority was given to extending the small paved area the Education Board had included in its plans. Before long the school had a netball (then known as basketball) court for which goalposts were donated by Wilkie. Curtains went up in the staffroom, posters appeared on walls and the first educational outings were organised. The very first was a visit to the Otago Museum, the next to a local farm. Later in that first year more than 30 pupils attended the Southern Zone athletic sports. The Grant's Braes representatives performed with credit.

On 15 August the school's official opening took place. Speeches were made by the local Member of Parliament, the Hon. F. Jones; the Mayor of Dunedin, Sir Donald Cameron; and R.A. Wilkie. Photographs were taken and, thanks to the generosity of Bob Wilkie, every family received a free print. After the ceremony, over a cup of tea, Gordon Grant and Wilkie seized the opportunity to point out to Education Board members the many problems presented by the state of the grounds. There was the small paved area already mentioned, inadequate fencing, a top ground which became a bog whenever it rained, and the curious contours meant that organised games were barely possible. The board members listened politely, nodded their heads, had another Home & School pikelet, then went on their way. This bland reaction and lack of practical help was par for the course. All educational authorities seemed to be strapped for cash. School committees constantly besieged them and, as a result, membership of any board required a thick skin.

All the same, Grant's Braes School was beginning to make progress. It had a telephone, a duplicator, a first aid kit and a few cups and saucers. There was no library, but the Dunedin Public Library delivered 150 books and changed them each term. Children were allowed to borrow books to take home for a week, and to use reference books for project work. There was a good atmosphere in the classrooms, reflecting the quality of the home life of most pupils. As was the practice in most schools at the time, prefects were appointed – just two, a boy and a girl. Monitors undertook a variety of tasks, the most popular being milk delivery and morning tea duties.

By the beginning of 1951 the roll had reached 81 and, six months later, it had risen to 93. Religious instruction began with Anglican and Presbyterian clergy conducting weekly classes. Trees given by the Dunedin Amenities Society were planted and working bees of parents began helping with ground levelling. Even better, chemical toilets were installed.

The roll reached 100 in September 1951. There were still three teachers. The headmaster took Standards 3, 4, 5 and 6, an infant teacher looked after three primer classes, and the other assistant took Primer 4 and Standards 1 and 2. Within a year two more classrooms (and two more teachers) were on the way, and there was a proper cloakroom and a storeroom. Every Wednesday a bus provided by the Education Board took older children to the Manual Training Centre in Moray Place where the boys learned woodwork and the girls were introduced to cooking. A smart move was the decision that, after manual training, the children would walk to the municipal pool, also in Moray Place, for swimming lessons. Instead of returning to school in the official bus they were picked up by parent volunteers.

The range of activities increased when pupils took part in the annual primary schools' music festival in the Town Hall. The school banking service was introduced, teachers filling in the books and handling the deposits. This continued for years until the demise of the Post Office Savings Bank and later the Otago Savings Bank. Some cynic might suggest that the age of saving for a rainy day was replaced by the era of free spending.

All these developments were presided over by an ideal pioneer principal, Gordon Grant – tall, animated, cheerful – was a friendly and well-liked headmaster and a good administrator. There was regret when he left at the end of the second term in 1953, but there was also pleasure that he had been appointed to head a larger school at Opoho. He left Grant's Braes in good heart. In fact, he remained in touch for some time because arrangements were made for pupils to go from Waverley to have swimming lessons at the Opoho School pool.

STARTING TO GROW

Gordon Grant was replaced by A.R.C. Littlejohn, a cheerful rubicund type with an enthusiasm for sport. Before long the school had soccer and netball teams in winter, and cricket and softball teams competing in summer. In the classroom he was a traditionalist but his easy manner meant that he was popular. The school roll was growing and as this happened facilities improved. A projector was purchased, a sound system was installed and before the end of the decade Grant's Braes had its own dental clinic. It was, like every clinic in the country, known to the children as "the murder house".

Increasing use was being made of the school by community groups. Winter lectures were given by the Extension Department of the University of Otago, and by the Workers' Educational Association. Meetings were held in the school by the Family Planning Association and the Social Credit League. The grounds were made available for fairs run by the Scouts, the Guides and the Plunket Society. A tennis club was formed and its members provided money and muscle to extend the paved area at the school, put up posts and mark out a court. Unfortunately this led to problems. The club initially gained access to toilets and tea making facilities but when the caretaker complained about how things were left (including an unlocked door) the privileges were withdrawn. Using the improvements they had made as an argument the tennis people pressed for renewed access. Eventually conditions were laid down and there was talk of a bond, though there is no record of money being paid. Until the club folded some years later, there were periods of tension between the committee and the Saturday visitors.

Little use was made of the ground across Belford Street. Indeed, it was so little regarded that some bright member of the School Committee suggested planting a potato patch. This was done and for a couple of years the school coffers were swelled by about £120 a season, in spite of problems with blight. When at a later stage the Education Board grassed the area (or persuaded the City Council to do so), the Grant's Braes Football Club used the ground for Saturday morning schoolboy games. There was no shelter and the area was windswept. After several seasons of use, and refusal to allow the club to build a small pavilion, activities were moved to Ocean Grove, though the club retained the Grant's Braes name.

Only a couple of years after the arrival of Bob Littlejohn the Education Board began making noises about the need for an intermediate school in the Tainui area. Schools in the proposed catchment area were invited to comment. Because Grant's Braes was still a small school there were fears about the effect of decapitation and a meeting of parents voted against the proposal. However, further debate and an informal census of child numbers in the suburb brought about a change of heart. Support was given for what was to become Tahuna Normal Intermediate

School. When the school opened in 1961 the Grant's Braes roll was on a strong upward curve. Two important factors were sewerage and subdivision. Waverley was well known as a sunny suburb with spectacular views but lack of a proper drainage system acted as a deterrent to home builders. Once this basic facility was provided the demand for sections increased rapidly. At the same time social attitudes to caring for children had changed. This resulted in closure of the large Roman Catholic orphanage and the much smaller Anglican home in Vauxhall. The Catholic orphanage had a sizeable farm and when this was cut up into building sections the suburb began to grow like a mushroom. In passing, the disappearance of the orphanage football field curtailed the activities of one of the area's more colourful characters. A topdressing pilot, he sometimes landed by the Catholic home and walked home to lunch in McKerrow Street. The Anglican property was also subdivided and the children went off to foster homes. Those who attended Grant's Braes School were always referred to by fellow pupils as "the Home Kids". They included several who went on to make their marks in the media and in the academic world.

From 1959 onwards Waverley changed in style and character. At one time it was possible to hear the bleating of nearby sheep from the school grounds and it was not uncommon to see a rabbit while walking to and from the school. From that time the sound of saws and hammers became commonplace as the district began to boom.

The School Committee – now minus R.A. Wilkie who had retired after a tremendous contribution – was an active and lively group, working hard to improve the grounds, happy in its liaison with school staff and parents, but often at odds with the Education Board. The controlling body was regularly late in paying into the school's bank account the funds needed for such essentials as heating and lighting. There were two accounts. The A account held money from the board, the B account held funds raised by the Home & School Association and the School Committee. It was believed that one reason the authorities were tardy about making payments was that they knew the B account was always in credit so no overdraft fees needed to be paid. Some years later things came to a head when a somewhat stropky School Committee, tired of the situation, closed the B account and moved it to another bank, leaving the Education Board in the red. Thereafter the timing of deposits showed signs of modest improvement, though the relationship between the board and the committee failed to follow suit. The fact that for some years the committee included the chief reporter and the skilled cartoonist of the Otago Daily Times may have contributed to keeping the Education Board on its toes. Adverse publicity is welcomed by no-one.

Rising roll numbers at the start of the 1960s meant unacceptably high numbers in classes. Bob Littlejohn had 39 pupils in his room at a time when Alan Maslin had 45. And there was always pressure on space in the infant rooms. As a result an old classroom from the Cape Saunders

School which had closed down, was transferred to Grant's Braes. There were protests about this "dogbox" but to no avail. It was to remain in use for many years.

Whole streets of new houses appeared in Waverley and most of them were tarsealed. These pram and tricycle areas encouraged a better bus service but, more importantly, boosted the roll numbers at school and kindergarten. As the school grew it needed more facilities, which meant more and more fundraising activities such as flower shows and fairs. As is always the way, the work load fell on comparatively few shoulders as a dedicated band of parents worked to make improvements. In order to obtain some form of help from parents who contributed nothing, it was decided that an annual levy should be instituted. Most households accepted the idea with little dissent. The levy was not enforceable but it did mean that most families contributed at least £1 a year.

One of the techniques used to foster pupil pride in their school was the introduction of a distinctive uniform for sports activities. The Stewart tartan was chosen for skirts and rompers and for badges on T-shirts. Tartan sashes were also used on some occasions. The school bought material by the bolt and sold lengths at a small profit. In those days every household owned a sewing machine, and every mother knew how to use it. It is interesting to consider that esprit de corps was advanced by use of the domestic sewing machine.

The machines needed to whirl even more as the roll kept climbing. By September 1960 it had reached 276. It was recognised that the opening of Tahuna Intermediate would cause a reduction, but Waverley growth was such that in 1961 the Education Board called tenders for three more classrooms. They were built in 1962, the year in which Bob Littlejohn retired, the roll standing at 246. Alf Jones was acting headmaster until the new appointee, Stanley James, took over at the beginning of 1963. The upward climb had continued. Officially there were 299 on the roll but several children, staying temporarily at the Catholic convent, attended classes and sent the tally up to 306. Littlejohn had led the school for a fascinating decade of change and development. His successor was embarking on a different set of educational adventures.

A BROADENING BASE

From the immediate postwar years to the start of the 1960s the Education Department was more concerned with quantity than quality. There was a shortage of teachers, a rise in population, a backlog of building, and an urgent need to deal with these problems. As a result not all new buildings were of top standard, not all teachers delighted the inspectorate. In 1949, to help deal with the teacher shortage a "pressure cooker" scheme was introduced. Mature individuals from other occupations were persuaded to take a one-year course and were then turned loose on the schools. About 2500 teachers were trained this way, their skills ranging from below average to remarkably good. Grant's Braes had several products of this system and was more fortunate than some other schools. The brief presence of one disaster was more than compensated for by the presence of several products of this scheme who were able, as well as ready and willing

Stanley James fitted into the changing environment, though he took a little time to find his feet. Quiet, almost shy, he tended at first to do things by the book, but once he found that the School Committee encouraged initiative he began to flourish. There was a strong move towards liberalisation at this time. After years of standardisation the education system was beginning to shake off some of the old ways. The old Proficiency examination disappeared in 1945 but the teaching still tended to be bookish and mechanical. There were still teachers who wanted their pupils to sit up straight with folded arms. Stan James was happy to see his staff running "shops" and "post offices" in the classroom, arranging desks in clusters, encouraging group activity and developing "ordered freedom". He was a great enthusiast for library activity and individual problem solving and during his time at the school the library expanded greatly.

Communication with parents had always been on the agenda but James wanted to go further. He aimed at a community newsletter which would firmly establish the school as the focal point of Waverley. Cartoonist Sid Scales designed a banner heading which was used for many years and is still available. With journalistic help this project began but failed to catch on. After a couple of months there was a return to the conventional style of school newsletter.

As the roll numbers moved above 300 a clerical assistant was appointed for the first time. The school was an extremely busy place, with the 1962 classrooms full and a cloakroom converted into extra teaching space. Later, when the pressure eased a little, it was used as a miniature cinema. The avowed aim of the Government at this time was to reduce classes to 35, but this looked to be a long way off.

In 1967 the Waverley grapevine began transmitting rumours of a new school to be built near Rotary Park. Rather than regarding this possibility as a threat, the Grant's Braes connections felt that this might provide relief from the constant pressure being felt. At the start of 1968 there were 12 teachers (five of them new) as well as the headmaster. As there were only 11 proper classrooms the "dogbox" was still needed. There were difficulties with inadequate lighting and poor heating in some parts of the school. Slow responses from the Education Board continued to irritate. Indeed the School Committee went ahead and paid for the lighting improvements on the understanding that the board would reimburse as soon as funds were available.

Ground improvements continued with further planting, including trees along part of the Belford Street ground. Not for the first time, nor the last, vandals destroyed them. Pressure continued for a community hall on school grounds. An architect on the School Committee produced a sketch plan for a hall measuring 60ft by 40ft, including the facilities required by city by-laws – a kitchen, stage, toilets and handwashing facilities. The estimated cost was between \$24,000 and \$28,000. A Government subsidy of \$1 for \$2 would be available but it would still be necessary to raise something like \$17,000. The \$4,000 in the Ratepayers' kitty looked a trifle puny.

There were other problems – of an enduring nature as it turned out. In spite of periodic pleas and arguments, the traffic authorities refused to provide pedestrian crossings near the school entrances on Larnach Road and Belford Street. With a rising roll and greatly increased road traffic, especially in Larnach Road, the School Committee believed there were compelling reasons for official crossings, but those with the power and the purse strings remained unmoved. Special training was given to school patrols. It had to be thorough because there was a strict limit to what patrols were permitted to do.

Educational visits continued – to the museum, the art gallery, port facilities, the marine biology research station at Portobello, and other places. The mind boggles when reading about a farm visit when 188 children attended in the morning, 110 in the afternoon. Six teachers and 13 parents acted as supervisors but it must have taken a very brave farmer to tolerate such an invasion. There is no record of a further visit. Some children were also taken to see exercise books being made – a useful visit because the committee and the staff went into business, buying in stationery and selling it to pupils at a small profit. Sales of tartan material also continued.

The school moved into the 1970s at the same time as Waverley was acquiring its own little village centre. The garage on Larnach Road opened in 1970 and soon afterwards the shops and medical centre appeared. Commercial activity increased but the Ratepayers' Association,

in decline for some time, finally disbanded. Disposal of assets had to be attended to and the school benefited to the tune of \$600 which came with an injunction that it was "to be used wisely". The money was promptly used as the nucleus of a building fund.

There was a modest decline in roll numbers – fluctuation had always been the name of the game – but no decline in parental support for the school. When supervision of those lunching at school needed more personnel there were 39 volunteers. Not everyone was so co-operative. The worst burglary the school had experienced resulted in the loss of a telephone, stamp pads, a whistle, staplers and a packet of biscuits. Clearly the offender was young. He found no money because the School Committee had decided some time before that it was unwise to keep cash on the premises and opened a cheque account for the headmaster's use.

Stan James decided to retire in 1973, moving out at the end of the first term. He had given 10 years of excellent service and seen the school through a series of changes, including variations to the curriculum. Quiet he may have been but he was also firm, and he had a dry sense of humour. When the New Maths syllabus was introduced there was a good deal of scepticism among teachers. Including James. A marginal note on an Education Board statement that the use of apparatus developed greater understanding of concepts and made for quicker and more efficient teaching, said simply: "Not always true". There would have been a wry smile on his face as he wrote it.

The new principal (headmasters were going out of fashion) was Noel Hudson, from High Street School. He came to Grant's Braes when the roll was 320, saw it rise to 350 by the end of 1973 and to 396 two years later. As a result more building was needed. While the carpenters were at work temporary accommodation was needed in church halls. In 1974 St. Phillip's Parish was paid \$20 a week, plus the cost of electricity and cleaning. This, it so happened, was the year that a poll of parents was held on the subject of sex education. In favour of its introduction were 53 families, against it were 73. There may well have been a collective sigh of relief from the teaching staff.

Even though the roll was rising the School Committee of the time took a different line from its predecessors and perceived the Rotary Park building proposal as a threat. A deputation was sent to the Education Board. Andersons Bay School did the same. There was a non-committal response but the authorities gave a broad hint as to their thinking. A relocatable classroom was provided rather than a permanent structure.

Two unusual events in 1976 concerned extremes of temperature. First came the destruction of one of the prefabricated classrooms. Residents were wakened one night by the sound of exploding glass and fibrolite as flames swept through the room. Soon afterwards the school

was closed for the first time by heavy snow. The fire led to a request for help by a teacher who said she had lost possessions worth \$400. She was not insured. The School Committee gave her \$100 and some of the children organised a stall and raised \$56.

Rooms were still used from time to time by community groups, but when the Roman Catholic parish priest asked if he could have a room once a week for religious instruction, the School Committee ducked for cover. It asked for a written application. It adopted the same policy when the Union Parish wanted a room for a creche. The applications were sent to the Education Board which turned both of them down – making the board the villain of the piece rather than the committee.

By this time Grant's Braes School had qualified for a fulltime caretaker. Some outstanding people were to undertake this role but not all were in the top bracket. A note in 1975 from the Grounds & Buildings Sub-Committee said: "Cleanliness – the caretaker is about to learn the full meaning of the word". Apart from such internal tussles the up-and-down relationship with the Education Board continued. When it was felt that, with a roll of roughly 400, an extra bed would be useful in the sick bay the board turned down the application. Irritated, but mildly mischievous, the committee wrote back accepting the situation, but asking for blankets for two beds. In the end the parents paid, through their levies. About 90% of parents contributed \$5 a year, but this percentage dipped dramatically when in 1977 it was decided to increase this to \$10.

The school was at this time going through a stuttering stage. Behaviour was not as consistently good among pupils, and there seemed to be an increase in unruly behaviour in the community. Two burglaries at the school were only part of the petty crime in Waverley. One break-in, on the same night as neighbouring houses and the local pharmacy were robbed, meant the loss of four recorders, a record player and two speakers. Some of these items were later recovered by the police but there was an uneasy feeling in the suburb – a new experience.

The school was in strife with neighbours when, without consultation, a tall adventure playground was erected. It not only spoiled the view of some people, but led to problems at weekends. The structure had a small play hut about 8 metres above the ground and this was welcomed by teenagers as a place to smoke and drink. It was a relief to those living nearby when "the Adventure" as it was always called, was redesigned and decapitated.

In spite of such diversions the district continued to support school efforts. The library grew and, when it was decided to open it once a week for an hour in the evening, parents helped supervise. School fairs became bigger and more ambitious, with a corresponding growth in returns. By the end of the 1970s it was normal for a fair to yield between \$1800 and \$2400.

THE BEGINNINGS OF CHANGE

What happened at Grant's Braes School in the 1980s mirrored the changes in society at the time. Inflation was on the rise and became rampant before the financial crash of 1987; unemployment increased as the market forces policies of the Government started to bite. The New Right was in control, with serious side effects for schools in poorer areas. Grant's Braes was not seriously affected in the financial sense but there was a steady decline in the roll.

In 1979 numbers dropped from 423 to 321, with 60 pupils going on to intermediate school, 12 heading for the new school at Rotary Park and 30 being lost when their parents moved. Some of the last-mentioned stemmed from the disappearance of head offices from Dunedin to northern centres. The domino effect of these changes impacted on clubs, societies, churches and schools.

In spite of this a report in 1980 indicated that in the past two years \$5000 worth of books had been added to the school library. This was largely due to a lively Parent-Teacher Association. Its committee included representatives from the staff and the School Committee and it was raising at the time an average of some \$4500 to \$5000 a year. There was an excellent rapport between the school and the community with more than 100 parents turning up at the annual "talk to teachers" evening.

Not all was sweetness and light, however. When a team from the Teachers' College tested children in Standards 3 and 4 for physical fitness the results showed surprising deficiencies. No time was lost in devising a programme to improve this situation (including daily runs round the block) and a meeting of parents was called to discuss the position. Among other moves a decision was made to buy extra playground equipment.

Regrettably, some delinquents in the district were getting their exercise in other ways. Weekend behaviour in the school grounds was at its worst. Windows were broken, children cavorted on the school roof, there were several instances of breaking and entering, bicycles cut up the grass and "the adventure" featured graffiti and drinking parties. Against this irritating activity must be set the fact that there was good support for clubs formed within the school. Parents co-operated to help with Arts and Crafts, Music, Drama and Physical Education groups. Some of them were also generous with their time and petrol when transport was needed for small groups or sports teams.

In September 1980 a raffle raised the remarkable sum of \$2000. There was a good deal of staff room teasing when it was found that the top prize of a portable radio had been won by the dental nurse. Words such as "extraction" and "pull" cropped up in conversation over the

teacups. A few weeks later, with money in the bank, it was announced that the school would spend \$2000 on library books, \$400 on instructional material, \$500 on tapes, \$400 on physical education equipment, \$500 on duplicating paper, \$500 on arts and crafts, and \$1000 on playground equipment.

Unfortunately, the relationship with the Otago Education Board was something short of cordial. In 1981, when the roll was down to 257, it was a matter for comment that the School Committee had spent \$25,000 in the past two years, but apart from the normal payment of salaries, heating, lighting and telephone expenses, only \$16,000 had come from the Board. It was a continuing pattern.

Turning from figures to people, it will have become apparent that in this brief history few names have ever been used. This has been a deliberate policy, on the score that a large number of omissions is less embarrassing than leaving out just one or two. But an exception has to be made in the case of two non-teaching staff members because of their impact on the life of the school. The first was Neil Preston, a larger-than-life character who was appointed caretaker in 1981. Big, cheerful, a real lover of children, he was coaching rugby within days of his arrival. Wherever he went he was followed by a small train of admirers. They wanted to talk, to carry things, to hold doors, perform any chore just for the pleasure of being with "Mr P" as they all called him. Parents heard so much about him that some even rang to ask how his name was spelt. Was it "Pea" or "Pee"?

The other important contributor to the welfare of the school is still there. Dawn Heggie was appointed secretary in 1984 and quickly became an integral part of the system. She has not only been an efficient secretary to the School Committee and the Board of Trustees but has been a second mother to children in strife, a sister to new staff members and a leader in organising functions. She has become the school's general factotum. She and her husband have wielded paint brushes, and Mrs Heggie has helped with the cleaning when the caretaker has been ill.

Before she came on the scene the roll had dropped again and this meant that Noel Hudson moved on at the end of the second term of 1983. There were 219 pupils to greet Lyn Johnston when he became principal at the beginning of the next term. A welcoming gesture was the painting of the hall in the holidays by Neil Preston and several parents. Earlier in the year the School Committee had returned to the theme of Education Board shortcomings. Parents had, in effect, paid \$1866 for sports equipment, \$2900 for photocopying, \$1086 for art materials, \$700 for library books, \$1619 for an electric organ, \$578 for fencing and oddments for the grounds, and \$3731 for what were described as "incidental running costs".

The year 1985 brought more ways to raise funds – a barn dance and a fun run. The best way however, was to enter into fixed interest investment. Inflation was running high and the School Committee deliberately deferred one or two non-essential undertakings and put more than \$1700 away at 21% - an unthinkable return by previous standards. This was the period when the sharemarket went mad. In the two years before the Stock Exchange crash in October 1987 there were queues at the banks raising loans, then queues at brokers' offices as people who had never bought shares in their lives climbed aboard the bandwagon. Among those whose fingers were burned in the crash were some well-known Waverley individuals – but not the School Committee. Even if it had been tempted there were regulations forbidding investment in the share market – but happily not in the fixed interest field.

Before the inevitable financial crash of October 1987 the brief reign of Lyn Johnston came to an end. In 1986 he announced that he proposed to take early retirement. This meant yet another change at the top, but a switch of principals was nothing compared with events which lay ahead. There had been a promise to review the New Zealand school curriculum before the General Election of 1984. In 1987, after two years' work, the Curriculum Review was released. But there was another review in progress. It was to be known as the Picot Report and it was precursor to what became known as the Tomorrow's Schools programme. An educational revolution was in the offing.

This was what faced Graeme Cocks when he moved from Macandrew Bay to Grant's Braes at the beginning of 1987. It was just as well that he was – and is – a positive type of person, not easily perturbed, because there was a continuing furore about the new policy introduced by the David Lange Government. On the one hand were those who were impressed with the idea of greater local input and accountability, while on the other there was outright condemnation. A magazine article at the time summed up the attitude of the opponents of Tomorrow's Schools: "If things continue like this we will produce a generation of kids who know all about caring and sharing, conflict resolution and peace studies, but very little about earning a living". There were Grant's Braes parents who agreed with that view but most were ready and willing to give the new system a try, and in Graeme Cocks they had a principal who was prepared to lead the way.

TOMORROW'S SCHOOL

An era had ended, a new era began. For 38 years Grant's Braes School had been served by community volunteers elected biennially to the School Committee. Now this system was replaced by one which featured a Board of Trustees elected by parents, and given much greater powers and responsibilities.

The last School Committee meeting was held in April 1989 and the Board of Trustees held its first meeting on May 28, with Graeme Cocks presiding. The final School Committee report was presented by its chairman and tributes were paid to the work of committees down the years. Then the new body got down to business, beginning by giving each trustee an area of responsibility. The decision was made to prepare an assets register as a baseline for action, a number of machinery matters were dealt with, and Dawn Heggie was quickly appointed secretary, a role she has filled ever since.

Early meeting agendas were notable for the long lists of incoming correspondence. In part this was due to a hasty scramble among plumbers, carpenters, auditors, stationery firms, painters and others who were eager to enter into contracts under the new regime. Up to 30 or 40 letters were received at early meetings but they were of secondary importance to major financial decisions as the new board grappled with its responsibilities – beginning by registering for GST and withholding tax. There was much to be done and some of the early meetings lasted for three hours.

Among the first purchases made by the new board were three new computers (with monitors, keyboards, printers and trolley), 50 new chairs for the hall, and a tape recorder. A reminder of the changed administrative set-up came when it was realised that the school was due for painting. In the past the Otago Education Board made the decision and set the tradesmen. Now it was up to the Board of Trustees. That theirs was no light responsibility became clear when the first quote was received. It was for \$44,000.

While this sort of activity was daunting to some school boards – and there were numerous tales of uncertainty and inefficiency – Grant's Braes was fortunate in the calibre of those elected to office. There were administrative skills and, of prime importance, accounting and financial management experience, among the board members. Happily this has continued to be the case ever since.

Nevertheless, it was a time of upheaval, not least for Graeme Cocks and his staff. Community support was vital and it is pleasing to record that the enthusiasm of the Home and School

Association did not waver. It simply carried on. Early in 1990 it handed the board a cheque for \$2000 and later in the year the school fair brought in \$3200. The system of asking parents to pay an annual fee to cover extracurricular activities continued, but this never seemed to dampen enthusiasm and support for school fundraising activities.

Education Boards having been abolished, there was centralised control through the Ministry of Education which had replaced the old Education Department. Funding was provided on the basis of the size of the school and it then became the responsibility of the trustees to handle the money provided. The Government applied pressure for schools to accept bulk funding, which would reduce the role of the ministry and increase the responsibilities of the trustees. For some the bait of additional money in the kitty was snapped up, and it has to be said that many schools found this advantageous. Grant's Braes Board of Trustees looked hard and long at the idea but after much number crunching decided that the disadvantages would outweigh the benefits and stuck with the status quo.

During the settling down period which followed the radical changes introduced by Tomorrow's Schools there were few major changes. Indeed, the first year or two might be termed a quiet period of consolidation during which patterns already introduced by the principal were developed. There were, naturally, some physical changes. For example, a fire and burglar alarm system was installed, and during one vacation the school was completely re-roofed.

In 1994 a new logo was introduced. It set out to symbolise, in three components, a young person in motion (active, stirring, free-spirited); the sun rising over the braes (hills) of Otago Peninsula; and the Grant crest as a flaming mountain. The colours of jade green and red were adapted from the Grant's 42nd (Black Watch) Hunting tartan.

Another innovation that year was a disco for the children. The invitation promised "lots of noise and dancing". There was also food and drink, supervision by the PTA, and parents then arrived at 9 pm. to collect their young. So popular was this Friday night frolic that it has become a regular feature of the school's recreational activity.

Improvements in facilities continued and the school was becoming extremely well resourced. When desks and chairs were updated the discards did not go to the tip. They were sold at \$10 a set and met a ready response from the public. The computer system was upgraded on a continuing basis as funds allowed and a new Fax machine was installed. Profits from such PTA activities as a quiz night and a Craft Fair helped fund these developments. The children also had enhanced opportunities for outdoor activity. Parents co-operated splendidly in setting up a fitness circuit in the grounds. It was designed to challenge (but not defeat) its youthful

users.

Apart from commercial organisations seeking contracts there were those who quickly saw the possibilities of deriving advantage through liaison with schools. For instance, children banking with Trustbank brought reward to the school by way of pro rata grants. Later, parents who registered with the Warehouse were able to earn cash for Grant's Braes. But the best returns came from Telecom which gave 5% of the value of toll calls to the school nominated by their clients. Naturally, parents were encouraged to nominate Grant's Braes, with remarkable results. In 1994 \$1000 came from this source, followed by \$5000 in 1995 and a whopping \$8000 in 1996.

The school was changing, and so was society. More and more families required both parents to be employed. This posed obvious problems of supervision. Grant's Braes was happy to become a centre for after-school activity programmes, privately run by competent individuals. A rental was charged for the use of school equipment and one classroom. Not all the participating children were from Grant's Braes and these visitors had reason to be grateful for the quality of playground facilities. There is even more reason today as this after-school programme continues.

Instituted about this time was an invitation to parents and children to indicate priorities in the improvements being made. Not surprisingly, the top three for students were sports equipment, computers and playground equipment. The parents put more computers at the top of their list, followed by landscaping and the upgrading of administration and hall areas.

One perennial problem was traffic hazards. It had now been accepted that, in spite of years of lobbying, there would never be pedestrian crossings next to the school. However, controlled crossing of groups of children after school continued. The bright orange coats, the warning whistle, a sign telling motorists there were children crossing just ahead, and a reorganisation of parking arrangements all reinforced the lessons about road use which were taught in the school. There were also lessons about "stranger danger". In a way these two warning systems impinged on one another. Concern for the safety of their offspring persuaded more and more parents to drive their children to and from school. Dropping them off and picking them up contributed to the traffic trouble. Good supervision, considerate parking and sensible monitoring gradually took over and accidents were avoided.

As well as these domestic matters there was national concern about the high rate of skin cancer in New Zealand. The Ministry of Health issued regular warnings about over-exposure to the sun and advised the wearing of hats in summer. This was taken seriously at Grant's Braes and parents were asked to provide hats for children to put on during lunch hour and playtime.

The staff set an example and, to help parents, the school bought a number of hats and on-sold them. Sunhats became virtually a part of the summer uniform.

The roll had slipped again in 1998, which was the year in which schools changed from a three-term to a four-term year. The decline to 142 at the February count meant the loss of two part-time positions. The move to upgrade and improve was not affected. A new office computer was bought and the old one moved to the library. A grant of \$12,000 from the Community Trust of Otago helped speed up development of the school's communication technology plan. Internet and e-mail facilities were introduced and the learning line in the library was cabled to all classrooms.

The Education Review Office, deeply suspected by some schools and sometimes vilified in the media, held no terrors for Grant's Braes. A comprehensive survey resulted in an ERO report which commented on excellent strategic planning and effective management of assets and finances. There was also mention of excellent community liaison. Although the report warranted only fleeting mention in the minute book of the Board of Trustees, there is no doubt that the principal and his staff, as well as board members, had reason to be greatly heartened by the tone of the report. Good teaching, happy children and efficient management in a well-resourced school – one could hardly ask for more.

INTO THE NEXT CENTURY

The year 2000 was of importance for a number of reasons, the prime ones being the entry into a new millennium and the fact that Grant's Braes School had been in existence for 50 years.

The advent of the millennium was marked by much public trumpeting and media hype. There were pious expressions of hope for a better world along with fears of computer non-compliance which might cause disaster and chaos. All this was in the public domain. The school held no celebrations for the very good reason that, as ever, it was closed when the new year dawned. The subject was discussed in classes and in due course each child received a Millennium Medal.

Of more special interest was planning for a different type of celebration – jubilee reunion. There was much cause for pride. Not only had former students made their mark in a wide variety of ways, but the school had become the focal point of Waverley. Community spirit was strong. This had been demonstrated in 1999 when the school received a totally unprecedented gift. St. Nicholas' Anglican Church, a neighbour of the school, presented a cheque for \$1,200, the proceeds from a church fair. It was explained that the church wanted to demonstrate that it was far from inward-looking, that it was community-minded. There were no strings attached. This was simply a demonstration of the bond between church people and another community-oriented institution.

In February of that year parents received, along with the excellent newsletter, a copy of the School Conduct Code which set out both the rights and the responsibilities of children attending the school. This was typical of the good communication which was a feature of school policy. For example, when a discipline plan was introduced there was wide consultation. First of all staff talked to students and listened to their comments. The plan was sent to the Board of Trustees for fine tuning, then sent to parents. Not until parents had had a chance to express views was the plan ratified.

At this time parents were contributing \$70 a year if they had one child at the school, \$110 if they had two children and \$125 if there were three or more on the roll. This money was important as a contribution towards the cost of school camps, transport to events, entry fees and the like. Payment was never compulsory. From time to time the amount was reduced or even waived when families were in financial straits. The important thing was that discussion was always possible, always confidential.

While the routine work of the school continued, a small committee, mostly female, was planning for a reunion in September. While the organisation was meticulous, care was taken to see that the programme was not too intensive, that there would be ample time for people to get together

and reminisce. About 200 former pupils, with a sprinkling of School Committee and staff members, enjoyed a memorable weekend. Some even came from overseas as well as from many parts of New Zealand. They registered on the evening of Friday 22 September, were formally welcomed on the Saturday morning when a cake was cut and a new piano played for the first time. While decade photographs were being taken an airliner, piloted by a one-time pupil, diverted slightly from its course and waggled wings in greeting. Lunch was served and there was just time for a little relaxation before catching buses to Larnach Castle for a dinner and dance. Buses brought people back at midnight and there were tales told of early morning excursions to nightclubs and the casino by some in the forty-ish group. Next morning there was a tree planting ceremony and people said their farewells. It was a splendidly successful event and a reminder of the central place of the school in the lives of so many. A small magazine was produced for the occasion and has become a valued souvenir.

The reunion was fun for former pupils but the current crop had something even more exciting to look forward to. After much careful planning a section of the grounds was converted into a modern-style playground equipped with a remarkable array of climbing, swinging and sliding devices, brightly coloured and providing interest and exercise for all ages. The whole area was scientifically designed to help mind and muscle. But from the viewpoint of the young, the important thing was that it provides fun – and will do for years to come.

That fine playground is a reminder of how things have changed in the lifetime of the school. Those who attended the reunion had an opportunity to compare the facilities enjoyed by staff and students with what they had experienced. The school was always reasonably equipped but there was none of the sophistication which is virtually taken for granted today. But if they had probed a little deeper they would have realised that life has not just changed for pupils but for staff. The good old days when teachers were often only minutes behind their youngsters in leaving for home have gone forever. Teachers work harder today than they used to, not just in preparing lessons and marking essays and projects, but in constant individual assessment of the children in their care. The demands placed on them by the school system are more intense than in the past, just as the demands on the Board of Trustees are greater than those faced by the old School Committees. One apparent difference is that trustees are entitled to a fee for attendance at meetings. Theoretically each trustee could claim hundreds of dollars every year. At Grant's Braes they claim nothing, thus freeing up extra funds to be spent on improvements. In recent years those improvements have included a facelift for the main entrance. The use of attractive furnishings has made it a welcoming place, and even better things are planned. The staff room – far too cramped – is to be extended and a proper reception centre will be provided.

One reason is that marketing and presentation are now essential components of school policy.

This is particularly the case in Dunedin where the population is at best likely to remain static, at worst to decline. Parents are mobile these days and can choose the school they think will best suit their children, so Grant's Braes has to compete in order to keep up its roll numbers. For that reason the Board has taken considerable interest in what the smaller neighbour at Rotary Park is doing. At the time of writing it is believed that about three-quarters of the parents with children there are wanting to retain Form 1 and 2 pupils in order to hold their numbers.

The Grant's Braes aim is to be known as a welcoming and inviting school. The six characteristics of an inviting school are listed as: respect for the uniqueness of the individual; a co-operative spirit; a sense of belonging; a pleasing habitat; positive expectations and a vital connection to society.

Again, the school aims to involve the community, and especially parents, in achieving the right culture. Parents are invited annually to contribute their input to assessing the weaknesses and strengths of Grant's Braes School. The obvious weaknesses of its position relate to its situation in an area with a maturing population and, to a lesser degree, its need to work so hard at ensuring road safety. Against this can be set the curriculum and its delivery by a dedicated staff, the quality of resources, advanced technology, a good public image, a strong physical education programme, and the fact that it is a Decile 10 school set in an environment which is supportive and, in broad terms, comfortably off.

The school is fortunate in the quality of its staff and in Graeme Cocks has a fine team leader. A thorough teacher and an enthusiast for physical fitness, he has a simple approach; the child comes first. He is constantly in the playground at lunchtime, he regularly tests every child in the school for reading and numeracy skills, and every Friday class representatives come to the office to discuss events of the week with him. They make comments, both positive and negative, and often the decisions made can be relayed to the whole school at the Friday afternoon assembly.

The pattern of school administration has changed so much that the principal has now to act like a general manager, accountable to his Board and responsible for what goes on in the classrooms and playground. More than that, he has to lead the drive to promote the school. Marketing is now a fact of life in the education system, and the Board of Trustees has taken this aspect of its role so seriously that it sent the principal to a course in Sydney run specifically for people in the education system.

The past for Grant's Braes School has included many high points. The present sees it a happy place in a supportive community, splendidly equipped and managed with skill. The future presents new challenges but all the indicates are that they will be overcome and the school will continue to play an integral part in the life of Waverley.