

Only memories remain of the grand old (Midlands) school

YOUNG men just finished at Horton College, near Ross, had reason to regard themselves as among the cream of the earth and, moreover, bound for big things. For Horton College, one of Australia's leading schools, had the reputation of turning out boys whose destiny in making their mark in life was rarely ever questioned.

The forebears of several well known Tasmanian families were scholars there some 70 or 80 years ago or longer.

It was the correct thing to have their sons educated at Horton College, and several interstate families evidently thought the same.

HORTON COLLEGE was conducted on lines much like those of the great public schools of England.

The boys wore a uniform and were generally referred to as "young gentlemen."

A brief history of the college was published in "The Tasmanian Mail" of December 30, 1920, and forms the basis of this present account. Firmly disciplined for the most part, and with week-day lessons from 9 am to 4 pm, the boys, each weekend, except for Sunday morning church at Ross, were free to enter into many outside activities offered by their country environment.

Climbing trees was fun and trees were plentiful. Another was bare-back riding, usually on a couple of horses "borrowed" from a farmer's paddock. And yet a further source of recreation was collecting birds' eggs.

Egg collecting was "in fashion" then, and swapping eggs was common. It is true to say that the nucleus of some important Tasmanian egg collections now used for reference by ornithologists in Australian museums were founded on those made by the boys in those Horton College collecting days.

Bottled up energies also had an outlet in bush excursions during a holiday and at weekends. To catch and boil a rabbit in a billy can, along with chip potatoes and a damper baked in the ashes, were events of great delight. This was country life at its best.

At least it offered compensation for the long and somewhat tedious walk to attend church service in Ross on Sunday mornings. Along the main road the boys walked three or four abreast, as many as 70 of them most days.

Possibly not so tedious was the walk some were said to have taken occasionally over the tree-clad hills which formed the college backdrop. For over that way, and not such a great distance off, there was a school for girls, though probably out of bounds.

A woodland tryst would doubtless have had its charms.

The boys, as those of today, were keen on organised sport. Their principal game was cricket, with many contests between school houses,

Those who didn't favour bush outings or who feigned sickness to avoid attending church at Ross might, in the absence of teachers, have sneaked out to play a quiet game of cricket among themselves. This, at any rate, was one explanation for an interesting discovery made by workmen demolishing Horton College in 1920.

On tearing up the flooring of one of the rooms they found a number of bats and balls. These had evidently been hidden there, pushed through a narrow aperture, and forgotten.

They were souvenired by some of the old scholars when the building was being pulled down, as were small pieces of cedar and other mementoes of the old school.

The college roll book according to records, contained the names of 770 boys. The school was opened in October, 1855, and closed in 1894. Well known Tasmanian families sent their sons there, such names as Headlam, Shoobridge, Kermode, Davies, Gibson, Hutchinson, Archer, Brownell,

The roll book of the college contained the names of boys sent there from both Victoria and New South Wales.

Today it may well be asked, "Where was Horton College?"

Such is the speed of time that, by most of us, both its name and former site have been forgotten or never have been heard of. Yet up to about 1920, when it was demolished, the college building stood as a prominent landmark on the left hand side of the Midland Highway going north just short of Ross.

A cluster of large pine trees, shading a cottage behind, now marks the site, a little

agement was in the hands of a "committee of gentlemen". Financially it had to stand on its own feet. For many years it prospered.

Mr Manton remained in charge for about three years, when he was succeeded by the Rev Mr Quick, who remained for 13 years.

Then came Mr J. W. Corton, followed by Mr S. Fiddian, the last named a noted mathematical master.

In 1863 came Mr W. W. Fox, and the reputation of Horton College as one of the most famous of Australian private schools was due to his diligent care in the training of hundreds of boys who, during a period of 26 years, passed through his hands.

Among them were boys who became several of Tasmania's most successful doctors, barristers, and clergymen, besides enterprising business men and merchants, and the sons also of leading graziers, farmers, and wool growers.

For many these old scholars held the kindest of memories of their

beyond the spur road turnoff into Mona Vale.

The pine trees in a sense are its shroud, thick branches casting opaque shadows over turf-covered foundations and broken bricks edging its former gardens; and likewise veiling the broad panorama across the Macquarie Valley once visible from its elegant tower.

Such had been its prestige as a school for "young gentlemen" that Horton College's closure in 1894 was regarded as a distinct blow to the advancement of early colonial education.

Few traces of the building remain.



● A relic of Horton College — the main doorway and graceful arch — by the side of the Midland Highway near Ross.

to the cause of education. Few memories persist longer than the memories of one's early, impressionable years, and chiefly the years spent at school.

So for a long time after Horton College had closed were former scholars to be heard to talk about their early days at Ross, in the old school behind the newly planted pine trees, with its green playing fields, and the broad horizons of its pleasing setting overlooking the Macquarie River.

And as if they had gone unscathed by birch or cane, saintly and consistent with the rules, their memories all were pleasant, any others now forgotten in the haze of time.

Drinking raspberry cordial on the sly in church through a straw with the bottle concealed in a pocket; nocturnal sorties to the storeroom for fresh bread left twice a week by "Doughy" the baker; the weekly invasion of

the mobile tuck shop — (a chaise cart from Ross) for sweets, cakes, and all kinds of sugar toffees (those from Mrs Goss were delicious) — these, while perhaps typical of any boys' boarding school, were nevertheless among the most persistent of their Horton College memories.

So also were the Summer-day baths in the Macquarie River; when they were let out of school at 3 pm instead of at 4. The cool slowly moving river and its fine swimming hole appealed. Then the great bonfires and displays of fireworks to celebrate Queen Victoria's birthday. Nothing so grand as these!

The other life of the boys was much like that of an English school.

There were the usual midnight suppers, pillow

fight and so on, and during the Spring a bird-keeping craze always came down upon the school. At this time a large shed in the playground was generally lined with boxes containing young magpies, jackasses, parrots, crows and hawks — the boys were budding ornithologists.

From "The Tasmanian Mail" of November 2, 1889, comes this item of ornithological news.

"Eagle at Horton College — The nest of an eagle was found in the branch of a stringybark, measured at 117ft above the ground. One of the college boys climbed the tree, using 240ft of rope. From the nest he removed two eggs."

Such were facets of life at Horton College, the grand old Midlands school.

THIS MADE HISTORY

BY MICHAEL SHARLAND

Lyne, Crosby, Crowther, Riggall, Burbury, Parramore, Stackhouse, Keach, Page, Pitt, Lempiere, Meredith, J. R. Scott, and many others.

Several well known individual names included Sir George Davies, Mr C. E. Davies, MLC, A. E. Solomon, once Premier of Tasmania, W. H. Burgess, William Crooke, and Cecil Allport.

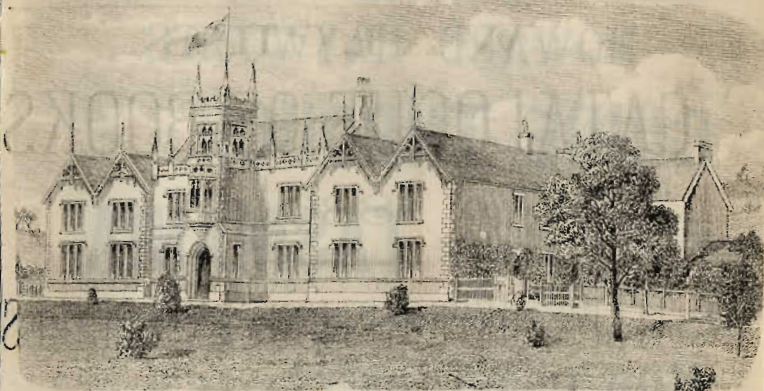
Horton College was founded by Capt Horton, of Somercotes, now the home of the Riggalls almost opposite the former site of the school at Ross.

The Rev J. A. Manton was the first governor and chaplain. Mr Manton enrolled his son as the first scholar. General man-

headmaster, who retired from ill health in 1889 and went to live in Launceston, where his daughter became head mistress of a ladies' college in Elphin Rd.

For three years afterwards the Rev J. de Q. Robin served as president and headmaster. A little while later the college got into difficulties, whereupon the gentlemen's committee decided to lease it to a Mr Steer.

Mr Steer did his best to resolve its problems, but for various reasons they were beyond solving. So in 1894 Horton College vanished as a school, amid general regret, but not before it had performed a valuable service



HORTON COLLEGE,

NEAR ROSS, TASMANIA,

Founded A.D., 1855, by the late Captain Horton.

President : REV. FRANCIS NEALE.

Head Master : MR. WILLIAM W. FOX, B.A., London.

Second Master : MR. SAMUEL PATTERSON, B.A., Graduate in Honours, Queen's College, Galway, Mathematical Scholar, Peel Prizeman, Assistant Lecturer in Mathematics.

Third Master : MR. A. R. AYLWIN, Melb. Univ.

Assisted by other Resident Teachers.

Pupils from the neighbouring colonies who have paid the usual fare by the T.S.N. Co.'s steamers, after six months' residence at the College, are granted a free passage back.

TERMS

(To be paid half-yearly in advance.)

Board and Education	£50 0 0 per annum.
" " " above 15 years of age	60 0 0 " "
Washing	4 4 0 " "
Medical Attendance	1 1 0 " "
Music	8 8 0 " "
Drawing	6 0 0 " "
Drill	1 10 0 " "