

CHAPTER TWO

"Saints"

Our parents were determined to complete our education at good private schools, although this meant considerable sacrifice on their part to meet the cost involved. My name had been put down for St Peter's College and I began my schooldays there at the age of ten in 1922. Doug Loan, also a student there, was given the responsibility of escorting me until I was sufficiently familiar with the journey to travel alone. At Alberton railway station I caught the steam train to Adelaide, and Doug joined the train at Woodville. On reaching the city we had to catch an electric tram on North Terrace to take us to St Peters in Hackney - about two and a half miles from the city. It was known through South Australia as "Saints".

I entered Saints in Form IV in the Preparatory School, which was close to the main entrance, then in Payneham Road, and separated from the Senior School by a long avenue of plane trees. The "Prep" School buildings were not very inspiring - red brick with a rather institutional appearance. My form master was G ("Mop") Edyvean, so nicknamed because of his unruly mop of thick brown hair. My chief worries were Latin and French - which I met for the first time.

The Rev. Kenneth Julian Faithful Bickersteth was Headmaster throughout my years at Saints, but F ("Ranji") Ware was in charge of the Prep which he founded in 1910. Ware had a very brown complexion, which earned him the nickname by analogy with the then famous Indian cricketer Ranjitsinhji, popularly known as "Ranji".

St Peters was founded in 1848 and was the fourth oldest school in the Commonwealth. Only three older schools existed - two in Tasmania and King's School, Parramatta, in New South Wales. Saints had gained a reputation for producing students of character and scholastic achievement in the tradition of the great English Public Schools. K.J.F. Bickersteth, educated at Rugby and Oxford, came to Saints in 1920. In 1922 the Prep had grown to 200 boys.

The nearest building in the Senior School was the Memorial Hall, then under construction beyond the far end of the avenue. Its foundation stone had been laid in 1921 and the boys of the Prep, on their way to morning Chapel, had to file past the stonemasons who skilfully chipped away at the heavy blocks of freestone from the school's quarry at Tea Tree Gully.

In my first year my special friend was E.J. (Edmund) Sharpe - the eldest son of G.F. ("Mate") Sharpe, Senior Maths Master and (with the Head), master of the Sixth Form in the Senior School - who lived in "the Cottage", a

rambling old house on the south side of the School Oval. I spent some happy times with the Sharpe family - Edmund, Janet and the younger son W.G., also known as "Mate". However our ways parted after Form IV - Edmund to move to Form Va and I to Form Vb in 1923.

In Vb my form master was N.J. Williams and my special friend was C.T. (Colin) Moodie. We were to be in the same forms for the next three years. Christian names were never used in those years, but nicknames were common. We had "Nigger" (A.L.) Ellis, "Pump" (P.H.G.) Geddes, "Jumbo" (J.H.) Hinde, "Moonlight" (H.M.) Morris, "Nellie" (R.M.) Niehus, "Judy" (R.C.) Parker and "Jerry" (J.R.) Price. How some of those nicknames arose will always be a mystery.

D.H.A. (Denzil) Foote was the son of the conductor of the Adelaide Orchestra, and in the form room before the master appeared he would often delight his form-mates with an impromptu "organ recital" at his desk - fingering imaginary keys and pulling out imaginary stops, to the accompaniment of "organ noises" from his versatile throat. Then he would conduct an imaginary orchestra with a ruler as a baton.

Forms Va and Vb had doorways opening on to a small quadrangle with the boarders' dining room on the opposite side. Several of us used to play a game known as "feet off the ground" during morning recess or lunch time. Boys

would stand on doorway or verandah steps, or on plumbing structures around the quadrangle, while one stood in the centre playing "he". Boys would endeavour to change positions by darting across the quad, but if the one playing "he" caught them before they once again had "feet off the ground" then they had to take over as "he". A pretty harmless game, providing excitement and exercise to fill in a few odd moments with much shouting and hilarity.

In 1924 the Head made a radical change in the House System. Until then the "Houses" into which the boys were divided, for the purpose of sport and other competition, were named after the masters in charge of them. From 1924 the day-boy houses were named after founders and benefactors of the school - Short, Hawke, Farrell and DaCosta, the boarders house continuing to be known as School House. I found myself in Short.

Moodie and I moved to Form Va in 1924, under "Ranji" Ware who had just returned from extended leave, occasioned by his wife's sickness, to take up duty as second-in-command of the Prep. The new master-in-charge was E. Stokes. M.H.O. ("Micah") Forbes took us for French. In this year he had a roving commission, involving some duties in the Senior School. Our windows in Va had a clear view of the long avenue of plane trees joining the Prep to the Senior School, between the playing fields on either side. As the French period

approached we could see "Micah" striding down the avenue - his furled umbrella serving as a walking stick and his academic gown billowing out behind him. He would burst into the form-room with a "Bon jour, mes enfants! Le ciel est bleu, les oiseaux sont toussants! Comment vous portez-vous?" He had founded the Scout troop in 1922 and was a stickler for discipline, but he had achieved notoriety by his kilted highland-dancing over crossed-swords at school concerts.

Our individual desks had a slight slope and the wood was not particularly hard. Someone had found that the edge of a penny, pressed hard into the wood and dragged down, made a groove which could be smoothed by frequent pencil applications. In this groove a procession of small ball-bearings would roll down. This led to a competition between boys in the construction of the most elaborate "railway tracks" in the desks, meandering down from top to bottom and some even having "branch lines" with "points" at the junctions formed from half the point of a steel writing nib. This activity was restricted to times when the master was out of the room, and "trains" of ball bearings rolled merrily down to dive off the bottom edge.

The practice gained force and the surfaces of some desks began to resemble plates of black spaghetti. Eventually the practice came to the notice of the Head, and the chopper fell. All boys who had constructed the

ball races were required to attend school on Saturday morning and spend an hour or two, under supervision, planing their desk surface smooth again. There were no more ball races, but many boys left their mark in the form of a date and initials neatly carved in the desk.

During those early years of travelling by train from Alberton to the city the imposing new Adelaide Railway Station was being built, and it was a continuing interest to see the further progress made each day. Today it has been transformed into the Adelaide Casino, and the electric trams to St Peters have been replaced by buses.

On the corner of Todd Street and Brougham Place opposite our home was the residence and surgery of Dr Percival Cherry. He had a daughter Aileen and two sons, Eddie and Alan. Eddie was the elder, and slightly younger than I. When the time came for him to attend Saints I was asked to escort him, as Doug Loan had escorted me. This began a close friendship that lasted all the years we lived at Alberton.

The Cherry house was large, standing in spacious grounds that extended across the block from Todd Street to Kingscote Street. Both Eddie and I were proud owners of Hornby clockwork trains, gauge 'O', and on weekends I was invited to join him and spend the day assembling tracks that ran down the passage and in and out of rooms. Each week we had a different layout and our combined

collection of rolling stock, points and crossings made an impressive display. It was great fun, and sometimes I was invited to stay to tea. Their meals were very formal with finger-bowls and tasty dishes served by their maidservant, "Tay", which was short for Mrs Taylor.

My sister Marjorie used to play with Eddie's sister Aileen, but their chief interest was "dressing up" and acting stories from those wonderful volumes edited by Arthur Mee - "The Children's Encyclopaedia". They lived in an entirely different world. In those days Marjorie was still "the little sister" - the age difference of four and a half years kept us apart, and it was not until I left school that I began to appreciate her as a kindred spirit, a talented artist and a staunch ally.

After attending Miss Bartlett's kindergarden, Marjorie began school in 1924 at Girton House near the City, travelling with Ella Kayser, Ted's sister. However, two years later Girton was reconstituted as Girton Pty Ltd, which required a substantial monetary investment by all parents with girls at the school. This was too much of a burden for dad, so Marjorie moved to the Methodist Ladies College and travelled there with Florence and Grace Kirby, who lived at Port Adelaide.

* Radio Broadcasting, or "Wireless" as it was then called, was introduced in Adelaide in 1924. The first transmitting stations were SCL and SDN. The more

powerful SCL was an 'A' class station operated by Central Broadcasters Ltd. and financed by listeners' licence fees. Station SDN was 'B' class, financed by commercial advertisements. Programmes consisted of music, talks, market reports, news and weather information with the accent on music - both 'live' and recorded - and transmission hours were very limited. Every "listener" was required to pay a licence fee to the Government.

I built my first "crystal set", a rudimentary radio receiving unit with variometer tuning and headphones for "listening in". The receiving aerial was strung between the top of dad's flagpole and a chimney on our house. Hoisted by a sashcord through the pulley at the top of the guyed pole, it consisted of stranded copper wire, isolated by porcelain eggshell-insulators at each end and connected by an insulated "lead-in" through a window to the crystal set. The set was about the size of a 4 litre wine cask and the "crystal detector" on its top surface had a metal "cats whisker" which had to be applied to different areas on the crystal until a sensitive spot was found, giving rectification of the incoming signal. Programme schedules were published in the daily papers and we would sit beside this contraption wearing headphones and listening to the still small voice and the music.

My grandmother at Woodville was an invalid, unable to leave the house. I made a duplicate crystal set for her, which gave her a great deal of pleasure.

With the dawn of hobby construction such as this I needed some tools of my own. Dad, not unnaturally, objected to my using any of his. With the expense of my school fees I was not able to have much pocket money, but with determined saving I managed to acquire a hand operated drill, a screwdriver, pliers, hacksaw and soldering iron - which sufficed for my immediate needs.

About this time I became interested in Meccano, and received one of the early construction sets for Christmas. The construction manuals which came with the set made me want to construct more and more ambitious models, and I put every penny of pocket money towards the purchase of more components.

We had an upright "Lipp" piano at Alberton and for three years from 1923 I had pianoforte lessons from Miss Grandfield who lived at the corner of Brougham Place and Railway Terrace. The theory of music fascinated me and each year I passed the theory examinations of the Trinity College of Music - but I was very lax with my practising and sat for no practical exams. When I began to study for Public Examinations at school I dropped the pianoforte lessons. It was evident that I would never be an accomplished pianist although I loved music.

Graduating from comic papers such as "Chips" and "Comic Cuts" I had become an avid reader of the stories about the imaginary English public schools Greyfriars and St James, published in the weekly boys magazines, The Magnet and The Gem. These may not have been first class literature, but they extolled the public school tradition of fair play, honest behaviour and loyalty to the school and one's friends. They were good reading and I am sure they were a good influence on a generation or two of schoolboys. Well, when I moved up to the Senior School at Saints in 1925, and graduated from "shorts" to long trousers or "longuns", I felt as though I was becoming part of those stories. The spirit of the great English public schools was here, and we were made to feel that the school motto - "Pro Deo et Patria" - really meant something.

The first influence came from the stately buildings - the School House, the oldest, built in 1849 with its central clock tower and mullioned gothic windows - the Chapel, dating from 1861 - the classrooms surrounding the Big Quadrangle with its central fountain - and the Memorial Hall, then rising to second floor level but still far from completion.

The school day revolved around these buildings, beginning with a brief service in the Chapel, with its tiled nave flanked by tiers of carved pews and a blue ceiling with a geometric pattern of golden stars.

Prayers, a hymn and notices for the day were intoned by the Head.

In the Prep, each form had remained in its own form room throughout the day. If a different master was to take a certain subject he came to the form room; but in the Senior School, masters stayed in their own form rooms and when a master specialised in a certain subject - such as Physics, Chemistry or Maths - the boys came to him for that subject. Each boy had a locker in his own form room and for a "period" with one of these subjects he had to select the books required and move to the appropriate room. This usually meant crossing the Big Quadrangle. At the luncheon break there was always a wild rush down the pathway to the tuckshop by the Trinity Street gate. Moodie went home to lunch in nearby Marlborough Street.

The bell for afternoon classes was rung by the School Marshall, "Tit" Torode, and at the end of the day boys filed into the "Big Schoolroom" for Muster. Notices were read from the stage by the School Captain, but my attention usually wandered to the gothic panels on the side walls with the names of scholarship winners and the array of paper-tailed steel-nib darts on the lofty wooden ceiling - projected there by skilful boys of an earlier generation. That room was later transformed into the Stow Memorial Library.

The second influence came from the outstanding body of school masters at Saints in 1925, administering discipline to over 400 boys in the Senior School. Eight boys beside myself had moved into Form Va3 from the Prep Va, including C.T. Moodie (now Moodie II, because his elder brother Bob was in the Senior School), C.N. Thomas (son of Bishop Nutter Thomas) and G. Walkley - all of whom I was to have contact with in later life. There were also several new boys, including J.J. Bray and E. Cottrell and C.H. Bammann from Pulteney Grammar. Our form master was R.E. Cameron, affectionately known as "Cam", who had won the Military Cross as a Lieutenant in World War I and was to serve the School for 48 years, some as Acting Headmaster. "Cam" was a wonderful teacher and a great humanitarian. He was also my Housemaster in Short House.

Our form room was the central one in a row of three on the south side of the Big Quad. These three were later demolished about 1935 to make room for a larger quadrangle with surrounding cloisters. There was a heavy wooden door, always kept locked, between our room and the adjoining form room.

One of our members, "Judy" Parker, was the son of a pharmacist, with access to some of his father's chemical supplies. On more than one occasion he brought some gunpowder to school and, during the luncheon break, placed some in the large keyhole of this door. Just

before the bell for resumption of classes he put a match to this and smartly slapped a luncheon tin over the keyhole on our side. The result was that boys entering the classroom on the other side of the door found the room inexplicably filled with gunpowder smoke, which took several minutes to clear.

Another favourite practical joke consisted of surreptitiously opening a flask containing a solution of hydrogen sulphide whilst standing in the queue awaiting entry to the Big Schoolroom for Muster. The resulting smell of "rotten eggs" caused expressions of revulsion all around.

"Cam" took us for most subjects, but we had to move to other form rooms for French, Maths, Arithmetic and Physics - subjects which were optional choices not taken by the whole form.

"Crusty" Gillham took us for Physics - a delightful man with a puckish sense of humour, whose manner belied his nickname. I remember his saying to one of us "Youngman, I wish you would sit away from that window - I don't like the light coming through your ears". On another occasion he sent one of the class over to the chemistry lab to obtain some copper sulphate crystals from the chem master, J.S. ("Sneaker") Thomson, who had a reputation of being very careful with his belongings. The boy returned with five crystals. "Crusty" sent him

back with three, with his thanks. He said "I admire Mr Thomson -he has the tenacity of a British bulldog!"

Our "Maths" master was "Mate" Sharpe, a brilliant mathematician but very droll. When he did smile it was like a fleeting glimpse of sunshine through the clouds. He always carried a length of string in his pocket, with which he drew circles on the blackboard -holding one end with his left thumb and sweeping the chalk at the other end in an arc with the right hand.

One of our number, Paul Casson, played the trumpet in the School Orchestra, which rehearsed in the Chapel immediately after morning service. This meant that members of the orchestra arrived late for the first period on rehearsal days. The music could be heard from "Mate's" form room. When Paul arrived late for Maths, with his trumpet and a polite apology, "Mate" said nothing, but solemnly handed him a halfpenny.

Our family doctor was Dr A.V. Benson, a man moulded in the tradition of conscientious general practitioners. When I began school at Saints in the Prep he gave me a certificate of exemption from cricket and football because I suffered from a hernia in the groin and had to wear a truss. He had a curious habit, probably designed to promote child confidence. When I was confined to bed with any sickness, on perceiving a bottle of prescribed medicine by the bedside, Dr Benson would stretch the

muscles of his hand so that a small depression formed on the back at the root of the thumb and forefinger. Into this he would pour a drop or two of the medicine, raise it to his lips, taste it and smack his lips, declaring it was good!

In common with many boys at Saints I used to have my hair cut at "Lodge and Wilkinson - Gentlemen's Hairdressers" on the corner of Grenfell Street and Gawler Place in the city. A long-established business, they had a system of mechanised brushes. Secured to the ceiling above the row of barber's chairs was a long motor driven shaft carrying several pulleys, around which hung elastic rubber belts. At the lower end of these belts could be inserted a loose pulley attached to a cylindrical brush on a shaft between two handles - rather like a hedgehog turned into a rolling pin. When a barber finished cutting your hair he would switch on the electric motor, grasp these handles with both hands and apply the rotating hedgehog to the back and top of your head. It was like being run over by a carpet sweeper, and any loose hairs were forcibly ejected towards the facing mirror. I rather enjoyed this procedure, which I have seen at no other barber's shop.

However, in my Prep days I contracted "ringworm" on my forehead - a contagious fungal growth on the skin. Mother was sure I had caught it from the rotating hedgehogs at the barber's shop. When Dr Benson treated

it I told him of mother's theory. He asked "Which barber do you go to?" I told him Lodge and Wilkinson.

"Nonsense," he said, "Best barber in town - I go there myself!" The infection disappeared in a few days.

When I entered the Senior School he considered my hernia had been cured, and said I could discard the truss and play cricket and football. Lacking experience, I was not very good at either activity.

Our gymnasium instructor was "Doc" Bennett. He had a rhythmical delivery of instructions for "physical jerks" -

"A one-and two-and three- and forwards
And one-and two-and three-and sideways--"

and so on. The old gymnasium was in the building now converted into the dignified Da Costa dining Hall. Half the floor was surfaced with concrete, for physical jerks, and the other half with tan bark for apparatus exercises. At the top of the slippery poles, on the lower chord of the roof truss, were scrawled the names of those young hopefuls who had been agile enough to climb right to the top - a feat much admired by all.

In the Senior School I became conscious of the traditional rivalry between Saints, with its Anglican background, and the predominantly Methodist Prince Alfred College - or "Princes" as it was universally known. Saints boys wore blue caps, Princes were red. The top

cricket and football teams of these two colleges met each year at the Adelaide Oval for contests known as "the Inter-Colls". To be sure, matches were held with other schools on their respective playing fields but the Inter-Colls at the Adelaide Oval were social events and the most important in the sporting calendar - eagerly looked forward to by boys of both schools and their families.

The Inter-Coll football match was always held on the last Friday or Saturday in July and the cricket was after examinations, over the second weekend in December - on Friday, Saturday and Monday. The Senior Schools of Saints and Princes attended in force, occupying two adjacent sections of the main grandstand and providing healthy vocal support for their teams. An athletic contest was also held between these schools, but that was a relatively quiet affair.

School songs were sung at these fixtures with gusto, and each school had several. I particularly enjoyed -

"Here's a health to all St Peters men
 Let us drink it while we can
 With a toast to now and a toast to then
 Fill a bumper, every man.
 Here's to you boys, old and new boys,
 'Neath the stern but kindly rule
 Here's health to all St Peter's men
 And a cheer for the dear old School!"

followed by a vociferous - "Hooray!"

Princes had a song, "The Best School of All" which I considered more musical than any of ours, but they also sang a parody. One of our Saints songs began -

"Here's to the good old School
The School of white and blue ---"

which ended with a lusty shout - "Buck in Saints!!"

For their parody, the Princes boys all rose from their seats, doffed their red caps in mock solemnity, and sang in a mournful dirge -

"Here'-to-the-funny-old School
The School-of white-and blue...."

ending with a shouted - "Sit on Saints!!"

It was a friendly rivalry though, and the Schools respected one another. As was to be expected, the fortunes fluctuated - but in my four years in the Senior School Saints won all Inter-Coll football and cricket matches against Princes. Our teams were dominated by several outstanding players. The first eighteen included I.H. Seppelt and J.W. Flood for four years and W.H. Baudinet for three. The first eleven included Seppelt and S.F. Downer for four years and Baudinet, Flood and C.G. Toms for three. It was a period of memorable sportsmen. A.H. Young was in the Inter-Coll Athletics team for five years and in the football for two.

I sang the School songs with enthusiasm and cheered my teams from the grandstand whenever a goal was kicked or a boundary hit.

Once a year the School made another mass exodus on St Peter's Day, the 29th of June. At St Peter's Cathedral, Saints and Pulteney Grammar boys occupied one side of the nave. On the other side were the girls of Woodlands Grammar and St Peter's Collegiate Girls Schools. During the service there were many attempts by the boys to attract the girls' attention, but my strongest recollection of those pilgrimages rests in the un-musical "squawks" made by the feet of the wooden chairs on the tiled floor, as the congregation rose to sing, or knelt down for prayers. Masters and school mistresses kept a watchful eye for any attempt at clandestine communication. At that stage I couldn't care less - I was more interested in Meccano. The afternoon was a half-holiday for the schools concerned.

In Va3, "Cam" had a great love of English literature and encouraged us to try our hand at writing poetry. I found this a fascinating exercise and had two poems published in the School Magazine. In later years I preferred to dabble in light verse and experiment with different metrical forms. In those days it was the fashion for young people to keep "autograph books", in which their friends were invited to write some encouraging or amusing message above their signature. I found such requests irritating, and devised my own rejoinder in verse -

"Dear (so and so)

No epigram or diagram symbolical

Flows from my pen - no anecdote or story allegorical

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A joke which (told in company appropriate) has
brought a laugh
Discretion bids me hesitate to place above my
autograph!
In search of a quotation, one in desperation has to
cuss
And sieze the Book of Proverbs, or perhaps
Eccleciasticus
I am, in spite of reticence, a most sincere well-
wisher
To you, in all the years to come, here's luck -
James H.T. Fisher"

At the end of the school year, when the exams were over, the form masters always used to devote our English period or two to reading aloud to us. This was looked forward to eagerly. "Cam" was an expert at holding the boys' attention, and he introduced us to the delights of Stephen Leacock - that Canadian master of nonsense and satire.

The School had an excellent library on the upper floor of the "tower", at the end of the newest line of classrooms beside the Chapel. The end-of-year readings inspired me to delve into this, and I began to devour the writings of H.G. Wells, Edgar Allan Poe and Thomas Hardy. I loved to climb the stairs to the roof and gaze across the battlements at the school buildings and the surrounding country.

Form Va3 studied for the Intermediate Examination - the first of three public examinations open to all-comers, which were held in the Exhibition Building on North Terrace in the city. I enjoyed the Intermediate syllabus and in the second term of school I found I was

doing quite well. We had fortnightly in-form tests. In one of these I came second, and was so bucked I rested on my laurels. In the next test I came twenty-second! That taught me a lesson. Never let up if you want to succeed!

At the end of the year all candidates for the public examinations attended the Exhibition Building on a published timetable of subjects. It was a terrifying experience, seated in rows at temporary individual desks, waiting for the printed examination papers to be distributed by the "bulldogs", as they were called - supervisors in academic gowns. Then the ordeal of concentration in a silence broken only by the sound of pens scratching on paper - there were no ball-points in those days. The exams lasted several days, followed by the long wait in the school vacation for the results to be published in the morning paper and the agonising search for your name in the long list of passes.

I passed the Intermediate in eight subjects at the end of 1925, and moved next year into Form VIb3 to study for the Leaving Exam under A.B. ("Ben") Ellis, the father of my contemporary student "Nigger" Ellis. This separated me from my closest friends. Moodie had not sat for the Intermediate in 1925 as he was very young for it and elected to wait another year, although he topped the form in Va3. Cottrell also decided to wait another year, but we maintained contact with each other - his interests

in Hornby Trains and Meccano were similar to mine and we developed a lifelong friendship.

In 1926 we moved from Alberton to Glenunga, on the other side of the city. About two and a half miles to the south-east, this was a more interesting and more prosperous suburb, close to the foothills of the Mount Lofty Ranges and within easy reach of the city by tram. The house was a triple fronted brick bungalow in Le Strange Street, with a very deep front verandah, a more spacious front garden, a very long back yard and a garage at the end of a side driveway.

Dad threw himself into improving the property with enthusiasm. I helped him erect a flagpole at the rear of the garage for our receiving aerial and we levelled an area in the back yard for a hard surface tennis court. We constructed a high wire-netting enclosure round the court and planted almond trees on either side. Dad laid brick storm-water drains around the house and a paved area at the back for car-washing. There were inter-connecting glazed doors between lounge and dining room, a servery between dining room and the spacious kitchen, three bedrooms and a laundry and toilet in the back verandah - a big improvement on our Alberton dwelling.

One of dad's innovations was a "hay box", designated to save gas by completing the cooking of a meal in a castored wooden box filled with hay to provide a high

degree of thermal insulation. It had little use. Mother "couldn't be bothered". Dad moved his office from Port Adelaide to Hindmarsh Square in the city and engaged a new secretary, a Miss Yvonne Bishop.

Eric Cottrell lived in Portrush Road, Kensington, and his family had a large rambling back garden through which Eric constructed many yards of gauge 'O' railway track made from a rolled steel section designed for sliding windows. We used to borrow one another's Mecanno parts to make complex models beyond the capacity of our own collections. I began to make accessories for my own railway out of scrap timber. I made a railway station and a signal cabin with electrically operated signals complete with colour-changing lights, controlled by switches in the cabin. From knowledge gained in my Physics Class at school I made wet-cell batteries to operate them. For Marjorie I made a two storey dolls' house with electric light, and I even tried my hand at book-binding.

Cuth Bammann, the other recruit to Va3 from Pulteney Grammar, lived not far from us in Glenunga, and we often travelled to and from school together by tram. We enjoyed the same type of books and we both joined the choir at St Saviour's Church, at the Glen Osmond tram terminus. At the end of 1925 Cuth moved into VI Modern, as he was going to pursue a career in the "halls of

commerce", but we maintained contact through church activities.

Later, dad gave me a bicycle and I cycled the three and a half miles to school - which was cheaper and quicker than travelling by tram via the city, where it was necessary to change trams.

John Thompson, slightly younger than myself, came from England with his mother to live in Le Strange Street, two doors away from us. We became firm friends, and his mother befriended my mother, but we saw little of his step-father. We both had bicycles and we both loved making things. We rigged up a private telephone line between our respective bedrooms, using second-hand parts from the PMG's Department store and connected by wires run across the back verandah roof of our intervening neighbour, Nurse Smith. Calling was by battery operated bells. Nurse Smith thought it a great joke. When we had our windows open she said she could hear both of us.

Each year I bought "Every Boy's Hobby Annual", an English publication devoted to handicrafts and pastimes for the teenager. This gave designs for conjuring equipment, model railway accessories and many other things that I wanted to make, including a land yacht.

John and I clubbed together to buy the necessary material and made the six foot long land yacht, painted

red with a square canvas sail. Our intention was to use it at the beach. Mother took Marjorie and me for a summer holiday at Henley Beach and I persuaded dad to take the land yacht down on the roof of his car. We kept it in the garage at Del Monte, and John came down to christen it with me. However, we found the white sand of the beaches in St Vincent's Gulf was too soft to support the "Red Robin", as we called it, because the perambulator type wheels were too narrow and sank in the sand as soon as we began to move. So we tried it on the bitumen surface of the Esplanade. There was not much motor traffic here on weekdays and we bowled along at a spanking pace in the breeze, much to the alarm of those motorists we did encounter.

When we returned to Glenunga I tried it out in Le Strange Street but, moving off the crown of the road to give clearance to an approaching car, it overbalanced and threw me unceremoniously in the gutter. We lost our enthusiasm for land yachts after that.

With John I used to explore the disused silver mines dug into the slopes of the Glen Osmond foothills. We found Galena crystals which worked very well in our crystal sets.

Interstate relays of radio programmes were very rare in the mid 1920s. The Adelaide radio stations closed down for the night earlier than those in Melbourne, and I

found I could receive a Melbourne station on my crystal set, very faintly but quite clearly, after the Adelaide stations had closed down. I remember lying in bed before going to sleep at night, listening to a recording of "The Song of the Dawn". I thought that was wonderful - hearing something over a distance of 400 miles with such simple equipment. I never ceased to marvel at the miracle of music plucked from the air and made audible in a pair of headphones by a small assembly of wires and a tiny crystal - with no source of energy save that provided by a transmitter hundreds of miles away.

On May 9th 1927, The Duke of York (who later became King George VI) opened the new Federal Parliament House in Canberra - accompanied by his Duchess (now the Queen Mother). This was relayed by trunk line to Adelaide and I remember listening to Sir Hamilton Harty conducting Handel's Water Music Suite as part of the Canberra ceremony.

Marjorie changed school again in 1927, going to the relatively new Presbyterian Girls College at Glen Osmond - little more than one and a half miles from home and much closer than M.L.C. It is rather sad that none of the colleges attended by Marjorie still exists under its original name. Girton House has been absorbed, with the boys Kings College, into the co-educational Pembroke College. M.L.C. is now known as Annesley College and P.G.C. has become Seymour College. The latter two

changes were the result of the merging of the Methodist and Presbyterian groups into the new Uniting Church. Happily in Melbourne the identity of the corresponding colleges was not affected by this merger.

As well as my interest in things mechanical and electrical I became increasingly interested in "show business", and I was enthralled by performances of visiting stage magicians. With great care I constructed some of the conjuring equipment described in my Hobby Annuals and, after many hours of practise in manipulation before a mirror, I gave performances to my friends. I received invitations to perform before groups of schoolchildren and later at parties. I wrote and memorised my own "patter" and gained increasing confidence in presentation.

Dad took us to a performance of "The Pirates of Penzance", and my form at school had outings to matinee performances of Shakespeare's plays by the Alan Wilkie Company when it visited Adelaide. I loved all this, and the more I saw the more I wanted to see.

Then there were the Adelaide "open air theatres" on North Terrace - first the "Austral Gardens" beside historic Ayer's House, and later the "Exhibition Gardens" behind the old Exhibition Building alongside the S.A. School of Mines. To sit under the stars on a balmy summer night and be entertained by artists on a remote

brightly-lit stage was sheer magic. There was a pierrot troupe, uniformly dressed in loose white garments with huge black buttons and with conical white caps bearing similar black spots. Featured artists were "Billy Maloney and his silver stick" - immaculately dressed in white tie and tails with a silver topped black cane - and Rupert Hazel and Elsie Day. Elsie was a golden haired soprano, and Rupert's entrance always began with

"Everybody happy? - - - That's the idea!"

His favourite impersonation was an Anglican parson, "The Vicar of Mirth", with a droning delivery -

"My de-ah sheep. You whom I have fleeced so often!
- Yes, I think so!"

There were no public address systems in those days. Artists had trained themselves in voice production so that their sotto-voce asides could be heard in the open air at the back of a crowded audience. "Those were the days!" In the old traditions of the Music Hall, songs in which the audience could participate were very popular.

At the end of 1926 in Form VIb3 I had passed the Leaving Exam in five subjects, and moved into the Sixth Form the following year. I began to think about a future career. My love of things mechanical and electrical indicated engineering, and dad agreed that this was an appropriate objective. Enquiring about the pre-requisites for a degree course in Engineering at Adelaide

University I was dismayed to find that all engineering degree courses included chemistry as a first year subject. I was then only 15, and my Intermediate and Leaving Certificates already entitled me to matriculation on reaching the age of 16, but I had done no chemistry! There was no vocational guidance facility at Saints in those days, and so I had not been warned of this hurdle. Therefore, when I entered Form VI in 1927, I selected Chemistry, Physics, Maths I and II and English to study for the Leaving Honours Examination under "Mate" Sharpe. At the end of the year I passed in Maths I and II and Physics only. Four passes were required for the Certificate. I had found Chemistry at this level rather incomprehensible without prior knowledge of the subject, although I had done quite well in the practical work.

My Headmaster's comment was "He is young for this form. I hope he will return for another year." The Sixth form was the highest and a two-year stay there was not uncommon, but dad was doubtful whether he could afford another year at Saints. The fees were increasing. However, he decided to let me have another year.

There was great excitement in February 1928 when Bert Hinkler, a World War I ace from Bundaberg, Queensland, made the first solo flight from England to Australia in his tiny Avro Avian biplane. The London "Punch" published a front-page cartoon by Bernard

Partridge, showing a kangaroo waving a welcome to the tiny single-engined plane with the caption -

"Hinkle, Hinkle, little star!
Sixteen days - and here you are!"

This broke the 28 day record of the Smith brothers in 1919.

Dad began to make enquiries about engineering training. He could not afford the full fees of the University. The economy of the country was deteriorating and our financial future was uncertain. He found that the Postmaster General's Department was about to call applications for positions of Cadet Engineer in 1928. These positions provided training in the Engineering Branch of the Department and gave the opportunity of doing an engineering course at the University on a part-time basis. This was very attractive, but there was one drawback. Candidates for the positions were required to sit for the Leaving Examination as a competitive exam!

I had already obtained the Leaving Certificate in 1926, and was therefore already qualified to enter the University. This PMG requirement would mean my going back two years in my studies!

I therefore faced my first critical decision. Should I proceed with the Leaving Honours subjects and look for a job next year, or should I apply for a PMG

Cadet Engineer position and sit for the Leaving Examination again? I could not do both.

I decided to swallow my pride and take the second course. I had obtained quite good results in the Leaving Honours subjects by the end of the second term, with the exception of Chemistry - where I obtained 100% for practical work but only 17% for theory. Sadly I decided to drop these Leaving Honours subjects in the third (and final) term and study the Leaving syllabus in six subjects with the boys of the next-lower form, Vibi.

My colleagues in the Sixth form found this behaviour incomprehensible. My only regret was that, as a result, my name had to appear right at the bottom of the list of final year students for 1928 on the panels adorning the inner walls of the Memorial Hall. I shared my two years in Form VI with some notable students. In 1927, among others, there were the Colebatch brothers (G.T. and J.H.), R.B. Moodie (Colin's brother), L.C. Bridgland and K.A. Macdonald. In 1928 there were E. Cottrell, C.T. Moodie, J.J. Bray, C. Kerr Grant, J.R. Price and W.R. Ray. All of these were to reach positions of eminence in their professions in later life. It was a privilege to be in their company.

At the end of 1928 I sat for the Leaving again and obtained passes in all subjects with credits in Maths I, Physics and Chemistry! My Headmaster's comment was "I am

sorry to lose him", and I was very sorry to be leaving. My seven years at Saints had been very happy ones. Dr Benson gave me a certificate of good health, stating I was "quite fit to undergo a course of training in engineering".

I still had to face a selection interview in the Postmaster General's Department, but with that pass under my belt I felt confident of the future. As a last thrust, I sat again for Leaving Honours Chemistry, as the exam did not clash with the Leaving Exam times. It was a forlorn hope. Last minute cramming did no good, and I failed to pass.

In my last year at Saints I had begun to take an interest in extra-curricular activities. I joined the Senior Literary Society and the Science Club. Colin Moodie was a member of the first and Eric Cottrill belonged to both. Eric and I both presented papers at the Science Club meetings.

The Headmaster played a trick at one of the Senior Literary meetings. We used to meet at night around the fire in the entrance hall of the Headmaster's residence - then in the south wing of the old School House. The Head generously provided supper, but did not attend meetings himself. One night the meeting concluded with a reading by the President (English master "Sandy" McDonnell) of "The Monkey's Paw" - a one act play by W.W. Jacobs.

Lights had been turned out, and the hall was illuminated only by the flickering light of the fire and the small reading lamp. The carved wooden staircase to the Headmaster's living quarters rose into the darkness overhead.

The play was about a monkey's paw, bewitched by an Indian fakir to bestow three wishes on its owner. It had come into the possession of an elderly couple whose only son worked in the local power station. Their first wish was for two hundred pounds to pay the mortgage on their humble cottage. Next day a messenger brought the sad news of a fatal accident to their son, with two hundred pounds compensation from his company. As they mourned their loss on that stormy, howling night the aged father seized the paw and desperately wished for the return of their dead son. An insistent, irregular knocking began at the cottage door. As the overwrought mother struggled to draw the bolts, the father, suddenly fearful of what they might see outside, seized the paw and made a last wish -

"I wish him dead and at peace!"

As "Sandy" read this third wish and the door was about to open -

PLOP!!

Into the centre of the listening circle of boys by the firelight dropped a soft, dark inanimate object!

The gathering gave an involuntary shudder!

It was a soft cushion, dropped from the balustrade landing above by the Head, who had just returned home.

Even Headmasters love a practical joke sometimes!

"Sandy" McDonnell was my English master in the Sixth form - a rather dour Irishman but a great lover of the spoken and written word. I owe my love of English literature to his guidance. He was noted for his use of the long 'a' in pronunciation - as in Africa, translation, arspect and transparent. One of our form-mates, Sidney Downer, used to take advantage of Sandy's good nature, during a form-reading period, by stating in a clearly audible aside and apropos of nothing -

"S-A-R-N-D-Y"

K.J.F. Bickersteth was admired by some and detested by others. I thought him a wonderful Head. He had given me "six of the best" on several occasions, always for being late for school. "Tit" Torode on his morning rounds frequently poked his head in the form-room door saying "Fisher, the Head, 11.20", which meant I had to wait outside the green-baize studded door of the Head's study during morning recess, wondering what my punishment would be. When he found the caning was ineffective he gave me poetry to memorise. I bore him no grudge. He was fair and did much to maintain the high standard and reputation of the School.

In that last year at Saints I took part in the December school concert which, like "Speech Day", was held in a large marquee - as the Memorial Hall was not yet in use. I had heard rehearsals of the pirates chorus from The Pirates of Penzance being sung in the Chapel by one of the performing groups during lunch hour, and I longed to be involved. I sang a chorus with my House group. That was my swan song.

The Memorial Hall was a memorial to all old scholars who had fought (and some died) in World War I. It was completed in 1928 but not declared open and put into use until 1929, after I had left. The new Physics lecture theatre and laboratory was completed in 1928 and the Science Club met there. It was a tribute to the years of planning by "Crusty" Gillham, who richly deserved it.

In the 1928 summer holidays Eric Cottrell and I spent a week at Loxton on the Murray River with his relatives, Mr and Mrs Hugo Drabsch. With Paul Casson, another Saints boy living there, we made a canoe trip on the River to Berri, a distance of 12 miles as the crow flies but much more round the many river bends. It reminded me of Jerome K. Jerome's "Three men in a Boat", except that we had no dog with us. We took plenty of tinned provisions and, after a meal by the campfire, slept under the up-turned canoe on the sandy river bank. There were interesting river-locks to explore and

beautiful scenery. We returned as we had gone, happy and healthfully tired from strenuous paddling.

Eric and Paul returned to Saints in 1929; Eric and Colin Moodie for a second year in the Sixth Form with Colin Kerr Grant. I left Saints with many happy memories.