

# INTRODUCTION

As 1954 drew to a close, Australians were reflecting on the past year with feelings of confidence and, perhaps, a sense of history.

Australia had established the first permanent base in the Antarctic. In dramatic circumstances at Darwin Airport, the government had stood up to the might of the USSR by rescuing Mrs. Petrov (the wife of a Russian diplomat who had already been granted asylum) from a forced return to Russia. Australian Peter Thomson had become the youngest ever golfer to win the British Open. The young Queen Elizabeth II had toured Australia and the Menzies government had been re-elected.

1955, the year of Risdon Primary School's foundation, was a time of optimism, growing confidence and burgeoning nationalism world-wide. The Second World War had been over for 10 years. The old empires of European countries like Britain, France, Holland, Belgium and Portugal were already crumbling. In the following 30 years such empires were to vanish completely.

Australia had entered a period of peace and prosperity, and 'Development' was the national agenda. For development to proceed, it was believed that it was essential for us to increase our population. 'Populate or perish' was the cry!



## CHAPTER 1 IN THE BEGINNING.....

The post-war era was the time of the 'Baby Boomers' and of the government sponsored immigration programme.

The South Australian Education Department was under pressure to provide more school places for the growing population of children in the state. In Port Pirie, Pirie West Primary and Solomontown Primary together with the Catholic School had provided adequately for the early educational needs of the town's children.

The planning for a new primary school to be located in Pirie South must have been under way for several years before the school was actually built. A house plan for a 'Risdon Park School Residence' carries the date 1949. The existing schools must have been bursting at the seams by the time Risdon Park was opened in 1955!

At the end of 1953 when Mr Bill Brocklebank's house at 37 Kingston Road was being built, it was the only house on an unmade road with no power, telephone or neighbours. During 1954, Bill Brocklebank watched with interest as building materials were delivered to the new school site across the road. Progress on the building of the school seemed rather slow. Therefore, one day when Bill was working on the front of his house in January 1955, and he met the principal of the new school, Mr. Melville Middleton (from Lucindale), he was amazed to hear that the school was due to open on Tuesday 8 February, a couple of weeks away!

On the Monday, the day before the term was to start, workmen were still on site, solving the problem of providing access to the transportable buildings



*Teaching staff of Risdon Park School standing: Mesdames P. B. Brown, Middleton, H. Sydow, Mr. A. G. Battersby, Mrs I. G. Gerke. Seated: Mrs. R. Polkinghorne, Mr. M. J. W. Middleton (headmaster), Mrs. M. M. Fenn.*

which were more than a metre above ground - no steps had been provided! The weather was very hot and the new school looked less than inviting. There it stood - a row of transportable buildings, all tastefully located in a dust bowl.

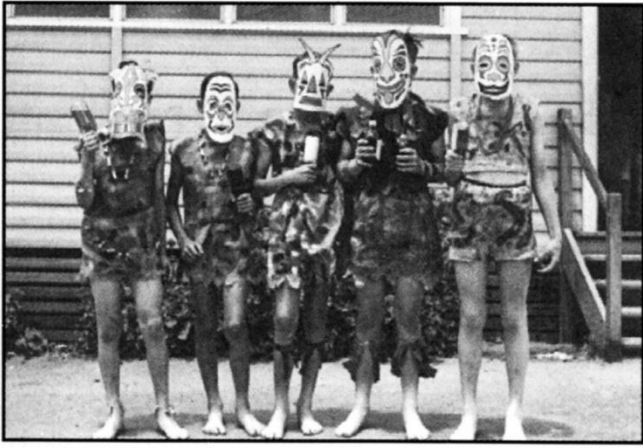
Nevertheless the school did open as planned on the Tuesday and the resourcefulness of both teachers and parents was put to the test when the heavens opened and heavy rain created a sea of mud in the school grounds.

Parent support was evident even on the first day (a presage of parents' help ever since?). One parent even had the foresight to bring in two big waterbags, to hang in the shade of the buildings, in traditional Australian style. At least the children had cool drinking water.

During the first few weeks the new headmaster had many problems to solve. One morning after about 20 points of rain, five or six cars, including the milk vendor's truck became bogged in the schoolyard. Mr Middleton had ongoing support from the District Inspector of Schools, Mr. K. Polkinghorne who suggested that letters be written to the Education Department about such matters as the laying on of water to a point nearer the school buildings and the condition of the schoolyard.







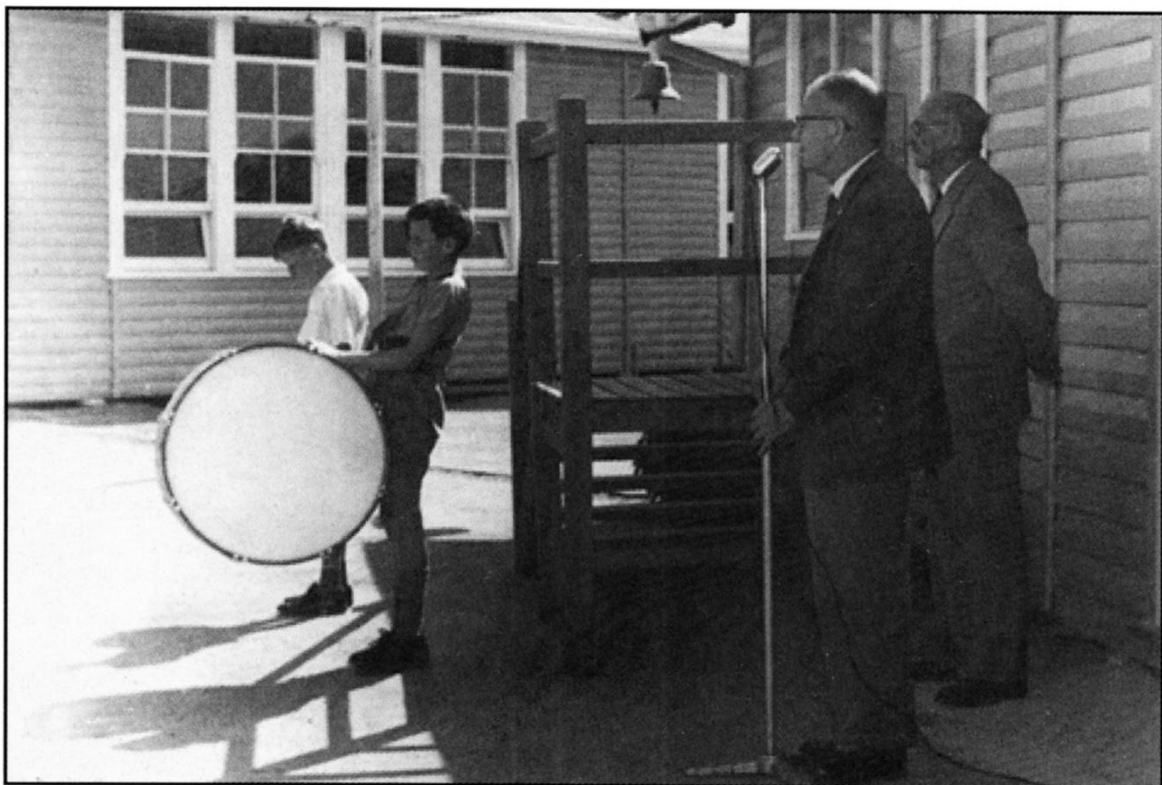
For schools in the 1990's, it is almost unbelievable that the school functioned without a telephone until May of that first year, and electricity was only connected in the September school holidays. As summer approached the dust nuisance was so bad that one day the school had to be closed at lunchtime. Sprinklers were frequently used to keep the dust down.

In spite of the trials and tribulations in that first year, the pioneering spirit triumphed and both children and teachers had fun at times, such as the visit in June of the Governor General

Sir William Slim to Port Pirie and the Fancy Dress Frolic in November which raised about thirty pounds.

Parents had been recruited early in the year, and both a School Committee (forerunner of the School Council) and a Welfare Club (later the Parents and Friends Association) had been formed. The first Chairman of the Committee was Mr I Purdie , and the Secretary was Mr L B Willson. The first Welfare Club President was Mrs L Benton, and Mrs L Barnes was their Secretary. It was very orderly in those days - mothers joined the Welfare Club and fathers the School Committee!

The school journals record many examples of the initiatives taken by these groups and the frequent help given by parents especially in developing the school grounds and raising money for essential items like film projectors and fans. Of course there was no air-conditioning in the school in those days.



Mel Middleton remained as headmaster for the first five years of the school's existence. His determination, hard work and ability to inspire the support and loyalty of his teachers and parents set the school on the pathway to success from which it has never wavered. As the school motto of the time indicates, Risdon Park School, as well as its children, was 'in limine' - on the threshold.

## Headmaster Transferred

A Pirie primary school headmaster who pioneered the city's newest public school, Risdon Park, will leave at the end of the year to take up a new appointment at Walkerville, an Adelaide suburb.

He is Mr. M. J. W. Middleton, who came here from Lucindale in the South-East, in 1955, to be the school's first headmaster.

Mr. Middleton will be replaced by Mr. S. R. Wilkinson, who is at present posted at Wudinna Area School on the Eyre Peninsula.

Mr. Middleton, who started teaching at Boors Plains near Kadina in 1929, expects to be moved to Adelaide late this year or early in the new year.

## RISDON PRIMARY SCHOOL STAFF 1955

Headmaster

Mr Melville Middleton

Grade VII (15) & Grade VI (28)

Mr Anthony Battersby

Grade V (31)

Mrs Helen Sydow

Grade IV (35)

Mrs Ivy G Gerke

Grade III (43)

Mrs Pearl B Brown

Grade II (27)

Mrs Margaret M Fenn

Grade I (27)

Mrs Audrey H Middleton

Beginners (31)

Mrs Rosemary A Polkinghorne

