

Dear Old Boys, I wrote this piece, after much research, in 2017.

I was queued up to present it at our 11th July 2017 Reunion held in the "Harrington Room" at the "Quay West Hotel".

Regrettably I was gazumped by "Funny Father Fitz" an L.C. 1957 class mate – Kevin Fitzpatrick – He delivered his Shackleton Sermon- "Disaster near the South Pole"- A long Journey too

Unfortunately, many of you were not present that day – so, even for those who were, I'll reset the scene.

The room we were in, albeit entered off Gloucester Street, had a wonderful view across Harrington Street east towards Circular Quay.

And so, even though we have never returned to that Hotel and I haven't had the opportunity to present this piece in context, just visualise that you're there rather than the Amora Hotel in 2018 or the Castlereagh Hotel in 2019 & 2020.

SO HERE GOES....

Arvo all,

Here we are gathered in the Hard-to-find "Harrington Room" of the Quay West Hotel. Good company, great food and enough grog to see us home. But the afternoon will soon be drawing to an enjoyable conclusion so, before we go lets do a bit of local exploration and walk-off lunch, not physically but in our imagination.

Come with me on a short journey – Stay close and I'll lead the way – Down the sweeping mezzanine stairway – Come on – This way and mind your step!

Quickly and quietly across Gloucester Street Foyer into the Car Park Lift – By the way, that triple bank of lifts across the way won't get us to where we are going – press "HP" the bottom button (Not the sauce "Houses of Parliament" but "Harrington Parking".)

Down we go – OK the doors are opening – Go straight ahead along the corridor and out through the portal doors – Into the dazzling afternoon light and BACK INTO HISTORY.

Let's pause here - at the gutter – be still for a moment - Take it all in – the sights, the sounds, the smells.....

Have you twigged yet? No ? Well let me explain.....

We're standing in front of the HARRINGTON MERCHANTS EMPORIUM – Either named after the street or after which the street was obviously named. – Look left – Over those roof tops – See the Semi-Circular Quay, with its forest of Tall Ships – Look beyond - There's our harbour even now gleaming in all its traditional splendour.

But at this moment - Look closer - Look adjacent - Looming through those swirling mists of time and tide – Just across the roadway – A bit to your right – Do you see it? “NO”? - A tad more to your right – See it now? Beside those steps leading down to George Street.

“So what is that I’m looking at?” You might well ask.

Why, it’s a Georgian Revival Façade rising from a sandstone base built just above the stone pavement.

Two storeys of fine brickwork - the bottom level has stone arched heads containing awning sash windows with an entry doorway to either side, all with fan lights.

Look higher – the symmetrical upper level has box-framed arched windows echoing those openings below.

Dentil brickwork and corbels between floors – Sandstone Sills throughout, all topped by an overhanging, Embellished Cornice with its grand Entablature.

A building so classically graceful in its simplicity – IT’S JUST A LITTLE BEAUTY!

Now, as we’re looking up - See it? At the very top - that painted lettering set into a frame at the centre of the Entablature right above the middle window – see it? “YES ?”- OK!, but its pretty faded right now, but can anyone make it out? NO?

That’s a shame cause it may have given us a clue as to the Building’s function.

However, if we look back down to Street level we can observe three well painted numbers adjacent to the uphill entry door.

You can just make them out from here – lets see – a “one”, followed by a “zero” and finally an “eight”

That’s 108 Harrington Street, The Rocks. HMMM!

Anyhow, take care crossing the street – not much traffic about – no sign of any cars but watch where you step – lots of carts with their horses and obligatory deposits.

Now we’re within Cooe, can you hear that noise above the commercial hum of the rocks?

Listen carefully – isn’t it emanating from one of those slightly open windows? Some kind of rhythmic to-ing and fro-ing! AH HA! Don’t you recognise it? Of course you do – It’s a recital of the Times Tables – MATHEMATICS BY ROTE!

Draw near so we can listen to the beat – Hear--Someone’s Keeping time – Conducting – A swishing back and forth, back and forth....familiar?

At this point we’re on the pavement -- hear that raucous racket? No need to listen too hard, but listen anyway and you might learn something.

"This bunch of mischievous, quarrelsome, hardy yet loyal beyond measure, real Australian youths", are all having their say at the moment - What a buzz – and its all coming from the Ground Floor.

Now pay attention - if we stand on tippy toes most of us can just peek over the cill - And look you now – A male adult has just entered the room and is setting out several lists onto a chalkboard.

What's this chalkie writing – Could it be the phrasing of FRENCH, perhaps its the parsing of LATIN?

Either way the class has become suddenly quiet - All quite enchanted by the scratchings ... you can almost hear the cogs turning as the lads get the hang of an exotic language.

Out of the adjacent window yet another cacophony – At the moment so rowdy, so noisy... But hush! - A mature basso voice has just commenced bellowing – Shouting down the boys and yes... they're finally responding. It's patently clear that this educator is extremely knowledgeable – It seems he's a master of GLOBES (THAT'S GEOGRAPHY) RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION AND ENGLISH HISTORY.

See the devoted children now sitting at their desks in neat rows, pressing forward to capture every word.

So earnest in their clean snowy shirts, starched buttoned collars, short pants and long socks – But not a tie in sight!

Now, they're listening in reverent silence as they are entertained by a genuine artiste.

Pay attention as he carefully guides them through many of his favourite enthralling stories –Which one will it be today???

The Norman Conquest, The War of the Roses, The wives of Henry VIII, Oceans of the world, the British Empire, The life of Christ, the Gospels....

Not only are the student's mouths opening - But so are their minds.....

Wide open to such *"Tall Tales or True"* – Submerged in it - Soaking it all up – What a way to study and learn.

From the remaining Ground Floor Window, although wide open – *"not a sausage"* – Complete silence!

Behold, a tall mentor quietly walking between the desks – Every now and then stopping and stooping to observe something over each and every shoulder.

What's he looking at and what's he advising?

"No smudging, use your blotting paper" "Mind your ink wells" "Elbows off the desk"

The desks are littered with clean, bright and yet still virtually blank pages.

Hovering over these sheets, a band of happy scribes – Pens and tongues held at the correct angle – Brows furrowed – All concentrating to the maximum as they slowly but surely acquire life-long skills in PENMANSHIP AND DRAWING.

Now there's an interminable drone emanating from above catching our ears. Possibly a Preacher reading aloud, hopefully gaining the regard of the lion's share of his charges.

Unmistakably this is a bold endeavour to capitalise on all his knowledge of READING AND COMPREHENSION and pass on his expertise and knowhow to this fine rabble of loyal students.

Funny thing, I reckon somethings and somebodies are absent – Missing from this scenario.

As an Architect I know there would be a Lower Ground Floor or Basement to this building as the site slopes well down towards George Street.

The Dunny would be separately housed but possibly a Kitchen or maybe yet another Classroom would be below the Harrington Street level.

I had taken a quick peak earlier -- And there they were - Another room full of earnest pupils.

The chalk board was covered in numbers proceeded by the symbols for a pound a shilling and a penny with lots of arrows up and down, back and forward– The bloke out the front was attempting to guide his charges through the ins and outs, mastering the mysteries of BOOK KEEPING.

It was only then I wondered - Despite this tutor's efforts even after several more years of mystical training, would the secrets of this curriculum remain undiscovered?

We've fitted in a fair bit this arvo..

Its now time to take our leave.

Lets walk back towards the Quay past the Northern Entry Door – Mind those steps encroaching onto the pavement. – Wouldn't be allowed by Council these days- Occupational Health and Safety would have heaps to say on the matter.

But what's that fluttering in the breeze? - A windblown and water-stained sheet of foolscap still clinging to the door after some weeks in the weather.

Why, it's an earlier forgotten circular - probably designed and written in perfect copperplate by him of PENMANSHIP AND DRAWING.

Allow me to read if for you – AND here comes the punch line! And I quote...

“The Brothers of St Patricks School for Boys beg you to inform the parents and others that, with the approbation of his Grace Dr. Vaughan, they have reduced their fees in the Parochial school (without in anyway lowering the standard of education) to 6 pence, 9 pence and 1 shilling. School will re-open Monday January 11th 1875”.

Now, I bet you’re all wondering who these historical participants, this Dramatis Personae that we just now closely encountered, were – TO THE VERY BEST OF OUR IMAGINATION MIXED WITH THE FACTS AVAILABLE:-

ENGLISH HISTORY, GLOBES AND RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION by Brother Ludovic – The Superior and the Master of Novices. He’s so knowledgeable about everything, including how to administer and manage a Boys’ School.

PENMANSHIP AND DRAWING by Brother Augustine – his adage “You aspire to great things – Begin with little ones”. (Recall the advertisement attached to the Entry door).

BOOK KEEPING by Brother Edwin – his Name Saint is patron to parents of larger families – Those who know, through practical experience, how to make ends meet.

MATHEMATICS by Brother Joseph – his Saint was a carpenter – Carpenters get the job done “Measure twice, Cut once”

FRENCH AND LATIN by Brother Stanislaus he lives by the Maxim “*I find heaven in the midst of saucepans and brooms*” (He quotes in French, or was it Latin?)

READING AND COMPREHENSION by Brother Paul – appropriately he had chosen the Saint who wrote many an Epistle – A man of letters and a man of advice. * It was his push and hard work that got M.B.H.S.D built in 1910.*

A FOOTNOTE FOR YOU ALL:-

3 years earlier in February 1872, after 2 ½ months sailing on “Star of Peace”. Brother Ludovic , had arrived from a South African Marist School – to take charge of St Patrick’s Primary School for Boys – In Sydney, Australia.

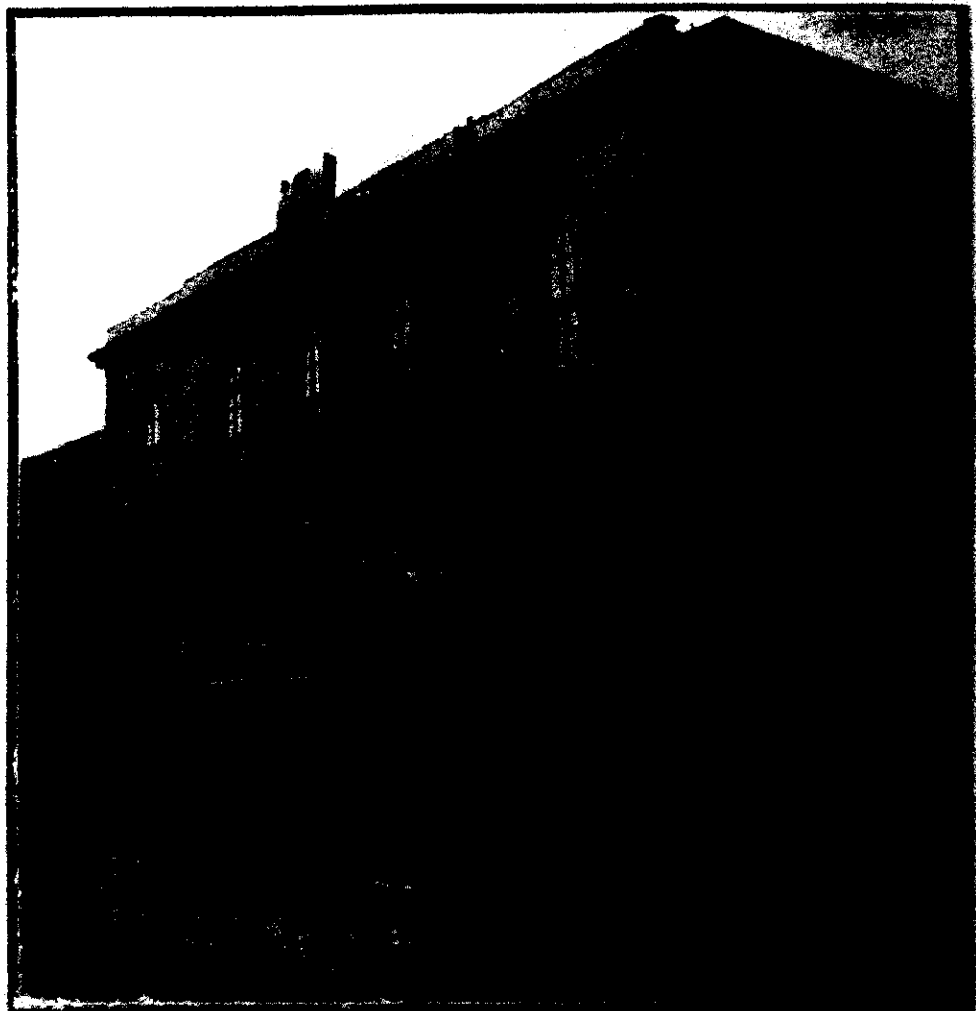
Concerning the Brothers, possibly I’ve drawn on imagination to a greater extent than the facts, but I can assure you that any blatant misinformation was completely unintentional.

FINALLY A POSTSCRIPT

I know we'll all agree, and regard it as a shame, that the building is long gone –
But if you type "108 Harrington Street The Rocks" into Google Earth – There
you will find it not 50 metres from where we're sitting – Just across the Road!

MICHAEL BLAKENEY ARCHITECT L.C.1957 MBHSD

*Finally delivered to 15 Old Boys @ the Masonic Club/Castlereagh Hotel Approx
2.15pm, on 15th October 2020*



MARIST BROTHERS' SCHOOL
Harrington Street, Sydney



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