

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW

L Jamieson This recording is being made in the home of Mr Rupert Minnett at 28 Kareela Road, Cremorne on 21st February 1972. We have present in the room Mr & Mrs Minnett, Mr George Sayers, and Mrs Howard and Mr L Jamieson on the school staff.(Mr Jamieson was the interviewer)

George, the first question I'd like to ask you is what can you remember about Merlin Street when you were first coming to Shore?

G Sayers: I went to Shore from Merlin Street.

L Jamieson **Was it a very closely populated area at the time?**

G Sayers: Sparsely.

L Jamieson **Would you say your home was a big home? Did you employ domestic staff?**

G Sayers: Three domestic staff, two women and a gardener. It was two acres of land.

L Jamieson **In our bursar's office we have a large photograph taken from a balloon which went up at Lady Hay about 1902 at a fete and it showed all that area over there. It seems to be practically bushland. Can you remember it like that?**

G Sayers: Part of the property adjoining father's home, I would say approximately an acre, was bushland.

L Jamieson **What do you recall about the neighbours? Were they mostly professional people, middle class, what sort of work would they have been doing?**

G Sayers: I think they were what you'd call upper middle class.

L Jamieson **What about the view of the harbour? Rupert, would you like to come in on this? What can you remember about the harbour view from the North Shore at the turn of the century?**

R Minnett: I remember the harbour well then. George had a better view of the harbour than I had. My father asked me to build a little room at the end of their house in Merlin Street so as he could see the ships coming in and out of the harbour. That room is still there and (it is) an old house.



View from Holtermans' Tower, late 19th Century.

L Jamieson **A fair proportion of the ships would have been sailing ships?**

R Minnett: Yes, both, not so many sailing ships, but there were quite a few. I would say half and half.

L Jamieson **Pleasure boats on the harbour at the weekend were still very popular. There was a lot of sailing at that time.**

R Minnett: Oh yes, quite a lot.

L Jamieson: **When you went into town, did you go to Milsons Pt or McMahons Pt and get a ferry? Suppose you had to go to town for a dental appointment, how would you have got there?**

G Sayers: By ferry from Milsons Point.

L Jamieson How did you reach Milsons Pt?

G Sayers: Either walk or by cable tram.

L Jamieson I've seen the pictures of the cable tram in the North Sydney history. They couldn't have been very comfortable to ride in.

R Minnett: The seats were beautiful

L Jamieson What would it cost you by fare, say, to get from Neutral Bay, do you remember?

R Minnett: Bent Street to Milsons Pt used to be a penny.

G Sayers: It was a penny across to the ferry.

L Jamieson Did you schoolboys get into strife on the ferry by mucking up or getting chased around by the crew?

G Sayers: We didn't.

L Jamieson You were frightened to because you were Shore boys.

R Minnett: That's quite right.

L Jamieson When do you recall having seen a petrol-driven vehicle for the first time?

G Sayers: I can't remember it but I also cannot remember a tramway going to McMahons Pt.

L Jamieson Not McMahons. Blues Point.

R Minnett: No, Milsons Pt.

L Jamieson Milsons Pt – oh, I must be in error there, I must check it up.

R Minnett: It turned round the corner below the school, at Mount Street and Walker Street.

L Jamieson **Would you have come to school on the tram normally?**

G Sayer: Walked.

L Jamieson **You mostly walked. That would have been a distance of a mile and a half?**

G Sayer: Yes, a little bit over.

L Jamieson **You don't find young men can walk a mile and a half these days.**

R Minnett: I got most of my training from running from Bridge Street.

L Jamieson **No wonder we had good teams in those days. Can you remember at what time of the day school commenced?**

R Minnett: Nine o'clock. I think it was nine or a quarter past, I'm not sure. Prayers first.

L Jamieson **Where did you have the prayers? In the prep room?**

R Minnett: In the Hall. In the old Hall.



Old Dining Hall, demolished in 1938.

L Jamieson **The old Hall with the big gas brackets above it and the honour boards at the end.**

R Minnett: That's it.

G Sayer: I agree with those remarks.

L Jamieson **We'd like to know where those honour boards went. I think LCR can probably tell us.¹**

R Minnett: LCR, he won't tell us now.

L Jamieson **He could have. When you had an assembly in the morning, or prayers, what did you have for music? Did somebody play a piano?**

R Minnett: We had an organ, George, didn't we?

G Sayers: Yes.

R Minnett: Who was the old – not Walmsley then? Burnside.

L Jamieson **He played the piano.**

R Minnett: Burnside played the piano and the organ.

L Jamieson **Would you say the boys really sang?**

R Minnett: They did sing.

G Sayers: Very well.

L Jamieson **Into what form did you first go, Rupert?**

R Minnett: Oh, I forget now.

L Jamieson **Well Clem Tiley² told me. He went into Remove B in 1901 and when he was there there were boys about three years older than he was in the same form.**

¹ In present day the honour boards are located on the first floor of the Centenary Building, on the western wall.

R Minnett: I couldn't really tell you what form. It was 1907 I went, didn't I? 1897 ... I was 13 years old.

L Jamieson **It probably would have been 3rd form or 1st form or whatever they called it.**

R Minnett: I was in Remove one time, I know, I don't know which remove it was, though.

L Jamieson **Can you remember who your Form master was?**

R Minnett: Baker.

L Jamieson **Paul Baker (LA Baker). He sang well, I believe.**

R Minnett: Quite right.

L Jamieson **I believe he was a stalwart in the choir and at school concerts.**

G Sayers: I was in the same class at the same time at the same age as Rupert.



² Clem Tiley was a student at Shore 1902 – 1912; and teacher 1915-1957.

L Jamieson **You've got no recollection now, I suppose, of how many periods you had during the day or how the day was divided up?**

R Minnett: I forget. There were two, weren't there, George.

G Sayers: I can't remember.

R Minnett: No, I'm not sure. I would say ... no, please don't ask me that, I forget.

L Jamieson **Have you got any recollection of what games you played at recess time or when you were out in the playground? Did you have any special kind of games you liked?**

G Sayers: Cricket and football, nothing else.

L Jamieson **No rounders?**

R Minnett: No rounders, no.

L Jamieson **Just cricket and football on school grounds.**

G Sayers: We might be practising fielding or kicking. But no other games but cricket and football.

L Jamieson **This was on the school grounds.**

G Sayers: There was no tennis played.

R Minnett: That's right.

L Jamieson **The school ground in those days wouldn't have been bricked up the way it is now. I take it the surface was probably pretty rough, was it?**

R Minnett: Very rough.

L Jamieson **Did you have a sergeant major who used to keep his eye on you as far as behaviour was concerned?**

R Minnett: Old McKay (*W McKay*).

L Jamieson **He wore the blue uniform?**

R Minnett: No, he didn't. Just ordinary clothes and he lived across the other end of the grounds.

L Jamieson **There were some old cottages down there where some staff lived, that have been pulled down. I think he must have lived in one of those.**

R Minnett: No, not at first. He lived along near the - almost where the tennis courts are next to the Roman Catholic place, right across the grounds. In the nor' west corner. We used to watch him coming across. He just waddled across the ground to his work.

L Jamieson **Why were you so anxious to watch him? Did he have rather an eagle eye on you young people?**

R Minnett: He was a funny old chap but he was all right in the long run.

L Jamieson **Did you have a tuckshop?**

R Minnett: No, we didn't, George, did we?

L Jamieson **What did you do about your lunch then? You always brought it from home?**

R Minnett: We used to bring it from home and sometimes we'd have it at the school, in the dining hall.

L Jamieson **Would you say the little boys got bullied at all in your day when you were young?**

G Sayers: I don't think so.

R Minnett: No, I'm with you, George.

L Jamieson **The attitude on the whole, the big boys to small boys, was pretty good?**

R Minnett: Very good.

L Jamieson **Approximately how many prefects would you have had appointed to keep tabs on you, say in about 1900?**

R Minnett: Oh, I suppose it was seven or eight, George?

G Sayers: I can't really remember.

R Minnett: Neither can I.

L Jamieson **I'm trying to track down the use of the school song. Do you recall it ever being used at concerts or functions?**

R Minnett: Oh yes.

L Jamieson **Very often?**

R Minnett: Not very often. Several times.

L Jamieson **Do you remember Miss Robson? ³**

R Minnett: Very well.

G Sayers: Yes, very well.

L Jamieson **Lindsay Clark once gave me some archives and in it was a little invitation card which Miss Robson used to give to the boys to come to afternoon tea parties. Do you remember those?**

R Minnett: I went to one.

G Sayers: I can't remember really.

L Jamieson **She must have been an outstanding person.**

R Minnett: She was. And EI (Robson) was a wonderful man himself, too.

L Jamieson **I'd be very glad if you could give me any detail at all about EI because we don't know a great deal about him.**

³ Miss Robson is Headmaster EI Robson's sister. Headmaster Robson was unmarried when he first started working at Shore, so his sister, Gertrude Robson, moved to Shore and looked after the pastoral care of the boys.

I've read Professor Holmes' book⁴ with a fair bit of detail about him; he was apparently a great admirer. What do you recall about him?

G Sayers: Outstanding teacher and sports, he was a wonderful coach in rowing.

R Minnett: Oh no, you're thinking of the other Robson. You're thinking of Leonard, aren't you?

L Jamieson **It was EI⁵ who founded the rowing tradition at the school. He must have rowed for his college at university in England. He started it. He started a number of things that still exist in the school, like the pink card and the 'come and go' book as we called it and various other things still in the school now because EI started it. Do you remember getting pink cards?**

R Minnett: Yes.

G Sayers: Yes.

L Jamieson **He came out and gave them to you personally?**

G Sayers: No, the sergeant major gave them.

L Jamieson **The staff I've mentioned – Hodges, Baker, Hall, Dixon, Linton - everybody I've ever spoken to had a great admiration for Mr Robson. I believe he was a particularly fine gentleman.**

G Sayers: He was a wonderful man.

R Minnett: They were all – all the ones you've mentioned were wonderful gentlemen.

⁴ "Shore" by ER Holme is available to download on the School's website: <https://www.shore.nsw.edu.au/community/archives/publications/shore-history-and-war-publications>

⁵ EI Robson was the first Headmaster of Shore 1889-1900. LC Robson (no relation) was Shore's fourth headmaster, 1923-1958.

L Jamieson Do you remember Woodcock (*GAN Woodcock*), who was at school about 1904? They used to call him ‘Splinter’.

R Minnett: No. I remember the name and that’s all.

L Jamieson He went to America and he used to send me money when I was in the Prep school to build library shelves and things. He put up a memorial there to all these men that I’ve mentioned – a little shield that we put up to recall the men who were then in his time. Did Walmsley coach you for cricket?

G Sayers: Yes.

R Minnett: Yes.

L Jamieson How many teams would you have had?

R Minnett: A B Hall – and also we had another man, Alec Bannerman, outside the school.

L Jamieson Of Test cricket fame. What about the relationships between staff and boys? Did the staff always wear gowns and mortarboards when they taught?

G Sayers: Yes.

L Jamieson George, when you were a prefect you made a suggestion about colours?

G Sayers: I made a suggestion (that) in order to distinguish the prefects from those who were not prefects, I suggested the colours were eliminated and a mitre used on the cap instead.

L Jamieson To a certain extent that’s still maintained only we don’t use the mitre anymore; we use the school badge. The prefect wears the special hatband which would be the equivalent now. That’s a good point, worth remembering. What did you do apart from football, cricket and rowing, for extracurricular activities?

G Sayers: I think the answer to that is there were so few boys in the time that Rupert and I were there, there were only 96 boys in the school. If you weren't between 10 and 11 stone, you played in the 1st football team whether you liked it or not.

R Minnett: Some had honour thrust upon them.

L Jamieson **How often did you train as the 1st XV and the 1st X1? Did you train twice a week?**

G Sayers: I think again the answer to that is people walked a lot more in those days than they do at the present day, and you were always in pretty good nick.

L Jamieson **What about net practice?**

R Minnett: Oh yes, I had net practice. It was at Shore ground, twice a week.

L Jamieson **With a professional bowler. Against whom did you play on a Saturday? Did you play most of your matches on a Saturday?**

R Minnett: Well, we had a Wednesday match occasionally. What are you talking – football or cricket?

L Jamieson **Well either.**

G Sayers: Cricket - University Vets and I Zingari (?)

L Jamieson **They were going in those days.**

R Minnett: That's right.

L Jamieson **And they still are. If you had to play Newington, did you worry about getting out to Newington when you were playing away?**

G Sayers: We were deputed in turns to carry the bag with all the gear in it.

L Jamieson **You sent by ferry to Circular Quay and then by tram?**

R Minnett: We went by ferry to Circular Quay and by whatever it was, train ...

G Sayers: Train or tram. There were no motor cars.

L Jamieson **You could have used quite a big proportion of your Saturday getting to the ground and getting home again.**

R Minnett: The things we used to love in the times we went to Newington was to go there and they had a swimming pool. We used to look forward to a match at Newington to get a swim. Remember that, George?

L Jamieson **It's taken us till 1971 to get a swimming pool at Shore. You only had 90-odd boys in the school. That would mean perhaps only 1sts and 2nds in football and cricket, or only a 1st?**

R Minnett: I think we had 1sts, 2nds and 3rds.

L Jamieson **They gave caps, didn't they, to the boys who were in the XVs. When would they wear them?**

G Sayers: At the matches.

R Minnett: At the matches, yes.

L Jamieson **Did you have trouble with boaters in your day, too?**

R Minnett: Oh, the kids used to knock them to billyo. You'd hang them up on the hooks outside the sergeant major's office and when you came down afterwards to get your hat, very often there were a couple of holes in it or the rim torn off.

G Sayers: That's what we call 'pegging' today.

R Minnett: It was all done in good fun.

L Jamieson **The Headmaster thinks rather differently about it these days. He takes a very serious view of boys who peg them. They were very valuable. What would you pay for a straw hat in those days?**

G Sayers: A couple of bob. Something like that.

L Jamieson **They're something like \$5⁶ now. Boys used the expression 'going down shore' if they want to go down to the shops to get their lunch, or a boarder will come to you, *Sir, can I have shore leave?, or Can I go down shore? Did you use that expression in your day?***

G Sayers: The whole district was known as 'shore'. Going 'down shore' means going down to Walker Street.

L Jamieson **Were you allowed down there at lunchtime?**

R Minnett: Yes.

L Jamieson **What was your main idea of going there?**

R Minnett: Sometimes we'd go down and buy our lunch there.

L Jamieson **Or meeting the Monte St Angelo girls? What about disciplinary system at school? Did they have drills for minor offences if you mucked up in the classroom?**

R Minnett: Drills on Saturday mornings.

L Jamieson **How long did your drill last and what did it consist of?**

R Minnett: The drill consisted of about 10 minutes usually. That's in the early times – it got longer later. It was a small drill when old Sergeant Major McKay was there.

⁶ Equivalent to \$48 in 2017.

G Sayers: I was kept in during a time I should have been practising cricket to play noughts and crosses on all the wastepaper that was in the wastepaper basket.

L Jamieson **What had you done to get that? Do you remember much about Davies (Rev D Davies)?**

G Sayers: A great lot about Davies. One time in his classroom, if I may mention a saying, there was a man there named Charles Abrahams. Old Charles started talking a lot and poor old Taff Davies got up, he was on the rostrum, he says, *You're a silly fool, that's what you are, you're talking too much.* I remember that well. He was a wonderful man. He was a charming old man and very fond of fishing. You never knew what he'd say next. On a trip back from London after I left school I bought him a fishing rod and the first thing he says: *What'd you pay for it?*

R Minnett: He was a dear old cove, a dear old chap.



Rev Davies

L Jamieson **How did you get on about your supplies that a boy would have used, like stationery? Did you have a bookshop in the school, did the sergeant major sell you ...?**

R Minnett: The sergeant major had them in his office.

L Jamieson **Did you have to pay for your own pens and pencils and exercise books?**

G Sayers: I can't remember that.

L Jamieson **What about school blazers? Did you wear blazers for cricket?**

R Minnett: Yes.

L Jamieson **And you had a badge on the pocket. Was any restriction ever placed on where they could be worn or how often?**

R Minnett: No restriction, I don't think so, no. A lot of them used to wear them for flashness, I remember that. When they had 1st X1 on they used to wear them to school, not to the school but at the school sometimes just for flashness.

L Jamieson **LC Robson was very particular that they should be worn only to the match or up the river. Old boys sometimes talk about the cry went up in the playground, *Mill on*, and there'd be a fight at lunchtime. Do you remember many notorious fights?**

G Sayers: There weren't a great many fights. They were always held behind the lavatory on the east side of the playground. Someone acted as a cockatoo in case a master was coming along. That's the only time they were stopped. The chief transgressor on those days was a man named L G Merman (?). He and Clive Terry, they were the two.

L Jamieson **I've seen lots of Old Boy pictures where there's been a picnic up the harbourside somewhere with masters wearing boaters with the band and perhaps a**

cummerbund with a Shore diagonal. Did masters and boys fraternise much out of class or out of school? Would you say there were good relationships between them?

R Minnett: I would say there were excellent relationships.

G Sayers: Yes, I think a lot of the school was the fact that we were camped out there at rowing and we were camped in a hotel up in Gladesville, and they'd have a picnic with the masters who were there, Burnside (*RG Burnside*) and others, for the boys who were in camp. I think that's where those photos came from.

L Jamieson That still obtains to a large degree. The relationships in the rowing between boys and the staff have always been very good.

R Minnett: And also between the schools. Sydney Grammar School especially with Shore, when I used to go up there, obviously in latter years, much later years, I used to go up there – the fraternising of Shore and Grammar was wonderful.

L Jamieson There'd always been a very strong bond between the sheds of Riverview and Shore. They lent us a boat about 1902 and we've never forgotten it. Now when you were at school, Federation would have taken place. Do you remember much about it as a schoolboy, in 1900?

R Minnett: No impression at all.

L Jamieson What about the Boer War? Do you remember anything much about that? Mafeking, for example.

R Minnett: No. I know there were a lot of celebrations after it was all over.

L Jamieson I've only known one man whose name was on the Boer War list and that was old Darvall (*ED*) Kater . He was living up at Scone. I had a lot of time for Darvall. He was a fine man.

R Minnett: My oldest friends, Darvall and Charlie.

G Sayers: You missed Queen Victoria. I think Queen Victoria stirred more in most of us, her death. You can remember that?

R Minnett: You're right there.

G Sayers: She was very popular. I can remember to this day the feeling when I heard she'd died.

L Jamieson Did the school have any sort of memorial service for her?

G Sayers: I don't think so.

L Jamieson I can recall very vividly the memorial services for George VI. I could well imagine that it must have made a very deep impression on the social conscience generally.

G Sayers: I think the reigning monarch had more effect in those days than now.

R Minnett: There's one gentleman teacher you didn't mention –a man named Gerry Sulman (?). He was the physics master.

G Sayers: I've never heard of him.

R Minnett: Do you remember the old buildings to the right of the arch? He was on the ground floor, alongside the sergeant major's office. He had all sorts of different arrangements with his physics in there and there was one bottle of very potent, horrible smelling liquid and the boys used to go in and it would be turned off. Gerry Sulman was up at his desk and a boy would come in and turn this tap on and the room would be terrible, the smell, awful – what do they call that? There's some name for it. Poor old Gerry would walk straight down to the tap, he'd say, *I must have left that tap on*, and that happened three or four times in one day.

L Jamieson And he never tumbled to it.

R Minnett: He never tumbled to it. Poor old Gerry. Not many would remember Gerry Sulman⁷.

L Jamieson **I remember where those laboratories were because when I first came to the school I was quartermaster and I had my quartermaster's store in the old lab. You could still smell some pretty queer things in that room. Now there was one name I didn't put down there – (JF) Elphinston.**

R Minnett: Yes, I remember. I noticed you didn't put him down there. He was a very, very popular master and a very fine gentleman. He was (at a) later time. He wasn't there when we were there to start with. I saw a lot of him later.

L Jamieson **About cricket – surely you both must have seen Victor Trumper bat at some time or played against him. Would you like to say something about him, Rupert?**

R Minnett: I would say this, and I say this without fear of contradiction, having played cricket since 1902. I will say that the world's greatest batsman was Victor Trumper. You can have all your Don Bradmans – in fact, there are two or three more than I'd have before Don Bradman. This won't be published in the paper, will it? All the young coves ...

R Minnett: His partner came up to him between overs and he said, *Vic, this man's throwing*. He said, *Don't speak so loudly, they might take him off*. It was at the Trumper Oval in Paddington.

L Jamieson **The other artist would be Arthur Mailey, wouldn't it?**

R Minnett: Definitely. Arthur Mailey was a wonderful man in every way. Arthur was a man in this way, that if he got wickets he was

⁷ There is no record of a master named Sulman at that time at the school.
There was a DC Selman

happy and one time I remember he got none for 194, I think it was, and he was just as happy.

L Jamieson **Is that when he was claiming he was dropped three times by a man in the stand wearing a bowler hat?**

R Minnett: I'm not sure of that. I knew Arthur, he was a very great friend of mine.

L Jamieson **The one I'd really like to know about is Clem Hill. He was a left hander. Did you ever see him play?**

R Minnett: Did I see him play? I played against him on the Sydney Cricket Ground, for NSW against South Australia, he was a left hander and I was fielding at mid wicket and he got a short ball and he pulled it and he was a very strong man, Clem, and he hit hard, and he hit this ball hard, that high off the ground, all the way to me. I put my hand out and I dropped it. The cove on the hill called out, it was a man named 'Yabber' – he called out, *Bad luck*. Some cove said, *Butterfingers*. And Yabber turned round and said, quite loudly to the crowd, *Can't you see he's hurt his finger?* Clem Hill was a great pal of mine.

L Jamieson **He seems to have been a most stylish batsman from what I hear.**

R Minnett: He was, definitely.

L Jamieson **I've never been a great student of cricket, but you don't tend to get the batting artistry these days that people had in the days of Hill and McCartney, Trumper and people like him. It was an artistic job.**

R Minnett: When you mention those men, you're talking about the best cricketers the world produced.

L Jamieson **It seems to me to have been the golden age of cricket.**

R Minnett: This new man, Greg Chappell, not so much here but Greg Chappell is a much more stylish batsman than Ian and he's going to go somewhere else, that boy.

L Jamieson He certainly seems to have the temperament, doesn't he. You must have a very rich reserve of cricket memories to draw on, both of you.

G Sayers: Not me. I gave up cricket ...

R Minnett: Yes, you went and took tennis on.

L Jamieson There were good tennis players, like Anderson ...

R Minnett: George was an excellent tennis player.

G Sayers: Henry Marsh and I beat Wright and Campbell in 1910 and Wright and Jones in 1912 in the final of the NSW Championships.

L Jamieson Is there anything you'd like to say about the school?

R Minnett: How many coves are you seeing?

L Jamieson I thought I was only here to talk to George and he said, We'd better get Rupert Minnett in on this. I thought of doing the same sort of thing for Clem Tiley and Pat Eldershaw.