

INTERVIEW WITH JOHN READ

Date : April 30th 2013

Interviewer: Mr A D Cavill

Also present : Richard Clive (OBU) and Rev Nick Foord (Community Chaplain)

Venue : Banora Point, on the Gold Coast Qld.

The interview was conducted at John's home of 5 years, just prior to his 104th birthday (19th May)



AC: When did you start at Shore?

JR: I started at Shore in 1921.

What brought you to Shore?

I'd been going to Headford which was a Church of England School in Killara, we lived at Lindfield and my father was sent to England for business, he worked for WD & HO Wills and the place at Lindfield, even though it was nice to live in, it was very big, too big for just mum and I so we moved down to Waverton in Bay Road and when my father came back from England he said Killara was too far to travel to school and that Shore was just down the road. My father went to Shore and spoke with Mr Purvis. We left Bay Road and moved down to McMahon's Point which was closer to Shore.

Did you have any brothers go to Shore or are you the only one in your family who went to Shore?

I'm the only one in the family, an only child.

What are your memories of the School at the time; do you remember what it was like when you first went there?

The first day I went to Shore I went to 2A class, the old hall on the tarmac.

It is now the Masters Common Room.

You could walk in the door that leads onto the tarmac, we called it asphalt, go through another door that lead into 2A but we weren't allowed to do that, we went down by the fence at Graythwaite. Do you know who started that same day in the same class? ... J B Burrell (*Ed : J B Burrell was new to the Staff in 1921 and may have been the Master in charge of 2A*)

What memories do you have of the school life at the time, thinking back, was it a tough school to be at, does anything stick in your mind about some of the routines and the customs?

My opinion of it and from what I have learned since, the school was as good as you made it, if you behaved yourself and fitted in it was good but if you tried to go the other way, no, you were shown which way to go. The Prefect system was very good, the sort of behaviour on the school grounds, there was no mucking about, most of the Masters were excellent, two or three of them weren't.

When you say that, they weren't excellent, were they in your opinion just lazy or couldn't they control the boys?

Was Buck Jones (*I F Jones*) there in your day?

My first year at Shore (in 5th class - 1964) was his last year.

He was there in my day.

Buck was a nice man but let's finish it there.

And some of the other Masters that stick in your mind?

Bagot (*E M Bagot*)

In what way?

He was fair and he was a damn good teacher.

What did he teach you, what subject?

Maths, maybe because Maths was a subject that I could cope with. What about Madam Mackey?

Madam Mackey, she was reputed to be the first female teacher at Shore, teaching French.

There were two or three of us out of the eight in her French class and she kicked us out.

And you were in the 1st VIII in your last year of school?

It was the 1st VIII that Robson coached and it was an unusual crew because in 1927, Burrell, against his will, had coached the 2nd IV. When I say against his will, the two seat was a friend of his and the crew wasn't going very well. I think Clem Tiley who was Master of Rowing at that time persuaded him to change around as I was stroking the 3rd IV and he took me out of the 3rd IV to two in the 2nd IV then all of a sudden that crew started to go pretty well. Came the day of the heat, we won the Head by twelve lengths. We won the final only by 10 lengths but we had Bobby Miller was the stroke, John Orr as three, I was two, and Don Woods was bow. Bobby Miller was unflappable, you could never upset him and he made a damn good stroke and when Robson came along to coach the VIII, Bobby Freeth (*Rev R E Freeth*) had been doing it before that, "Creeping Jesus", that's what he was nicknamed, he wore rubber soled shoes. Robson took bow and two of the four (*Woods and Read*) as bow and two of the VIII, and the stroke and three of the four (*Miller and Orr*) as stroke and seven of the VIII. There was considerable discussion about it because we weren't a heavy crew, we were a very light crew, and all the pundits said, "why send them up, they have got no chance?" We beat Kings by three feet in the heat because we were out in the middle of the river and they were up against the Cabarita bank and we won the final by just over three quarters of a length from Grammar. It shocked everybody.

This was in 1928?

Yes

And that was Robson's first success?

Robson once said to us: that if we hadn't won he would have been fired from the school because the Council didn't approve of him being the Headmaster and coaching the VIII.

What other sports did you play at the time? Did you play Rugby/Football in the winter?

Yes

Which team did you reach in the football?

Occasionally I got up into the 2nds as fullback but Eldershaw didn't like me. I didn't do too well there. Cricket, no way.

Boys in those days could play cricket and row at the same time couldn't they?

Well it would be very difficult, if you were going to row. I was going to be in the rowing because when we moved down to McMahon's Point, Blues Point Road the old boatshed was there, not far from me and I had to go there. See anything that floated, a leaf floating down the gutter was interesting to me. True, and if they wanted a coxswain, alright I was a coxswain, they would come up to the flat and get me. I'm trying to think of the name of the Captain of Boats, wasn't Hunter but a name like that (*F D Hixson was Captain of Boats in 1921. Ed.*)

For which year?

About 1921. He got to know these things better than that and he would say, the rigger on such or such a boat wants fixing up, get down and fix it.

So you would do the fixing?

Yes. When the '23 Regatta came on, I was coxing the 1st IV, this again is not for publication. Freeth was coach, about a fortnight before the heat I was tossed out. A friend of some of the crew named Freeth took over, they were going to win didn't matter whether I was there or somebody else, they were a damn good crew.

That's a bit disappointing, it is always disappointing when that sort of thing happens.

I never forgave Freeth. You know the pear tree outside the old Masters Common Room, that was where he did it, where he told me. You do remember things like that. Because many years later when I was working for Commercial Union, an Insurance Company, I was sent to interview and arrange a settlement of not one of the company's guides but a third party. I knew who he was as soon as I walked in the door. He didn't know who I was and we settled the claim and he said 'that was very good gentlemen, very fair settlement'. I said 'yes it was, much fairer than what you did to a little coxswain'. I couldn't resist it and I walked out the door. The day Freeth tossed me out I was determined to do better than any of those people rowing, I did, I was in the house, 1st and 2nd course of stroke, Barry House, the best House, down the track. I wasn't a boarder. I won (in) the 4th IV, you heard the story about that too, when the 2nd IV won at the Head.

Was rowing in those days seen as being THE sport at the school?

Shore Old Boys are well known for the crews that had come from the school and from some of the oarsman and it was thought that Shore rowers had to do the job, not like some others.

There were big crowds on Head of the River days, there are plenty of photos from back then.

If you've ever seen a Manly Ferry Boat up beside the Cabarita course, well...

All tipped over on one side of the boat.

Personally, nobody taught me how to row, they taught me to improve what I could already do and Robson was just that man could do it because I belong to (Shore).

Talking about Robson, how did you find Robson as a boy? Did you find him an easy man to get on with? Did you have much of a relationship with him at all? When you were in his crew.

You had to be very wary of L C Robson, essentially I suppose he was a good man, I tell you who wasn't, Mrs Robson, she made up quite a bit. Joe Harris, does anyone know R J O Harris, Major. Harris he was another one who was very good indeed.

A Master then ?

Yes, he got the MC (Military Cross) in WWI, he wasn't an Old Boy from the school, he came from Tasmania. He was Master of Robson House when it was down in the observatory before they moved up to beside the school gates. He was very good.

Getting away from the sport now, did you do Cadets in those days?

My word, we were the best, we were C Company of 17th Battalion and say it was the guard of anything like that we produced it.

Did you enjoy Cadets as a boy?

Not the Infantry, cut it out, too much walking. I tell you who made it, Joe Harris and Onkus (Sergeant Major Davidson) everybody respected them. Davidson, I remember him so well and the way we won the Vllls, he was in the boatshed, he couldn't stop smiling and someone heard him say, 'they're my boys' and that was how he dealt with us. Good bloke.

I can't remember but had we won the VIII, was that the first time we had won the VIII for some years?

13 years, it was the 13th time we had won it and it was 13 years since we won it.

No boy at the school at the time would have seen the 1st VIII win since it was 13 years?

***Richard Clive:* Did you know this year we won The Head of the River for the 40th time?**

I knew we had won it. John Bagnall rang me to tell me.

When you left school, you left at a pretty interesting time I suppose, it was just prior to the Great Depression. How did you find that, leaving and going into the work force? What are your memories of that time of leaving school? What did you do once you left school?

A horrible time. The Shell Company wanted a clerk, there was an ad in The Herald, there would have been fifty of us turn up to get this job, the door opened and we were told the job had been filled.

Was your family affected, was your father's work affected by the Depression?

He was Manager of the fancy goods section of WD&HO Wills, he worked steadily through the Depression but he had to take a reduction in pay, they put it to them, we will reduce your pay but we won't sack anybody, and that's how he found it, I found it that I couldn't get a job.

What did you do, how long did that take for you to find a job?

About six months.

What was the first job that you had?

I got the job in an Insurance Company eventually and I took the place eventually who had been in the Union Company of an assessor who had been with the company for a long time and he retired and I got his job.

How long did you keep doing that job?

Till I left, well I was Manager of the Motor Vehicle Claims Department when I left and I had three Assessors working under me.

When you left though, was that prior to WWII or when did you leave?

I retired.

So you worked up until joining the Navy?

Have you ever tried to join the Navy? They wanted people to join as Anti-Submarine Detection people so you went down there and they told us we could do the training for it and everything else. Even to the medical, I passed them all, some of them were psychological and some were practical. I think there were twenty five of us from memory.

We were called up and we went before the selection board. I was the first one there and the Captain was sitting at the end of the table and there were several Commanders around the place. I remember it very well because the first question he asked me was the one that threw me out. "How old are you Mr Read". I said "I'm 31". "Oh" he said, "we don't want anyone over 28". In my service in the Navy, in the first he is the first and only falling (?) Captain that I ever lost, my temper was..... A falling Captain is about second to God when he is in command of a ship.

What annoyed me was I had put on my application form, my date of birth as the 19th May 1909 and if some of their people couldn't have worked out how old I was, his Secretary should have told him before. He was a decent bloke, I never knew his name, I never met him again. He turned to his Secretary who was a Paymaster Lieutenant, 'if you can find some way that we could use Mr Read's services, do so and do it quickly'. That was the sort of bloke he was.

So you then went into the Navy from there?

No, the Secretary rang me about a week later, and said 'there is a new scheme coming along and they want people over 30, it's called the Yachtsman's Scheme', see by that time I'd been sailing for a long time, I'd given up rowing and I was sailing the biggest yachts on Sydney Harbour. I was a skipper, I'd taken up from being beaten every race to being the scratch boat, and gee that was fun.

Where were you sailing from? Royal Sydney?

No, the owner, Snowy Carr, he belonged to Royal Prince Alfred. Royal Sydney was a bit hard to get into. My father kept his launch down the bottom of Green Cove also North Shore Rowing Club was down there. So that's how I started in the Navy. I had to have a Yachts master's certificate, had to pass their exams and go before Captain Ditchum which was a horrible name and quite often he lived

up to it. He was a good bloke. I got my Yacht master's Certificate, did all the other things that they needed and presented myself and I was in.

When you say in, what was the next step, what position did you get in the Navy?

I was sent down to Melbourne and as some of the rude sailors said I was sent down there not to learn to be a sailor but to be a gentleman because there was a saying there "he is an Officer and a Gentleman" but we did some courses there and we were sent to Newcastle to join the ... Auckland boats and go over to the United Kingdom and from there down to Brighton and they had HMS ... down there we did courses there.

And this was about 1940?

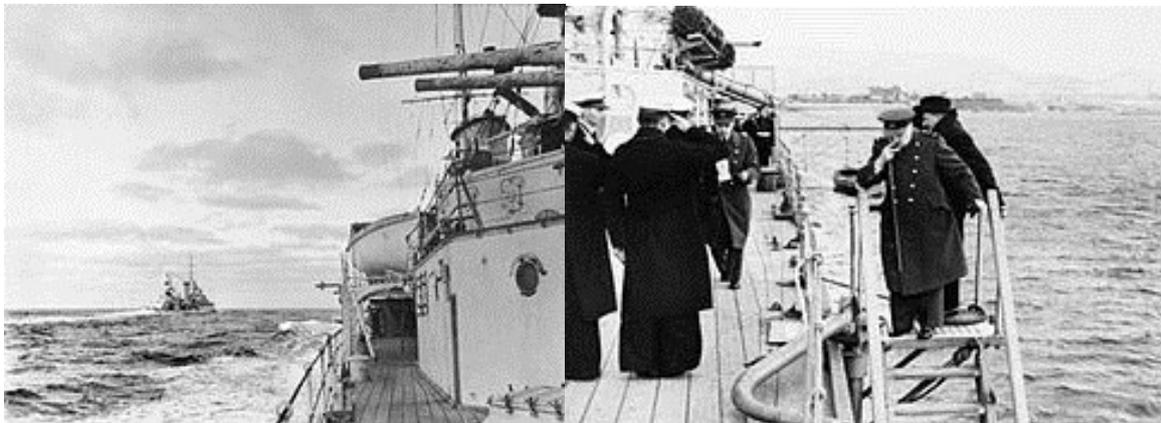
Yes, 1940 I think. When we finished we were told to go and see the Instructor/Commander and he would tell us what would happen to us from then on. Five of us didn't get an appointment, he said to us afterwards "Don't be disappointed, you are going to be experimental".

Did that worry you, to be experimental?

We didn't know what it meant because we had joined to play with the British, small vessels like trawlers and things like that and we were to be tried out in big ships but we had to do courses to get there. We all did pretty well because there was an aircraft carrier, battle ship and an old merchant cruiser and two cruisers that we were to be appointed to.

Which one were you appointed to?

I was lucky, I got (*HMS*) Ajax. I served on Ajax for about three and a half years.



L: HMS Achilles from the deck of HMS Ajax, off Montevideo R: Winston Churchill leaves HMS Ajax after a visit, Athens 1944

Which one was Ajax?

The (*Leander class*) Cruiser. You might have heard of the Graf Spee, when they trapped her down in Montevideo there were three ships, Achilles, Exeter and Ajax. I wasn't on her then.

That was a very famous action in the WWII when they got the Graf Spee.

For victory I suppose they didn't get the Graf Spee at all, they were waiting for her in Montevideo and that was a neutral port and I think the ships for about two weeks they were allowed to go into the neutral port and then they had to go out. He came out and he decided not to fight, he pulled the plug and scuttled it. That was before my time.

And you joined Ajax after that?

She came back to United Kingdom, (after being hit by a) shell and it had got a lot of damage and they had to fix it up and do things like that. I joined just after that.

Where did you serve with Ajax during the next three and a half years?

Lots of friendly places. Mediterranean- got blown up in the Med, Stuka came over with a bomb and he dropped it down inside us. That didn't do us much good. We had three boiler rooms and by the time he went away we only had one boiler room. That happened to us up in a place called Bone, at the top of the African coast. We had to get that ship back to the entrance to the Med, it is owned by Great Britain but Spain wants it back, a big Naval depot, we had to get Ajax back from Alexandria to the Med.

Was there a great loss of life when the Stuka bombed the Ajax?

13, down in the third boiler room. It went down to number two boiler room through the boilers and blew up on the ships side and left and the commander said that there was 8,000 tons of water that had come in and that hit the bulkhead between two and three boiler room, blew the bulkhead out and they were flashed up boils 300 pounds per square inch and everybody in that boiler room whether they were killed or drowned we never found out. One of them was a guy called Stephen York, Engineer Lieutenant and he and I became quite friendly which was unusual for a seaman Lieutenant to be friendly with an Engineer Lieutenant and Stephen had made himself a serviette ring of stainless steel as he had access to the engineer's workshops. He must have found a piece of stainless steel pipe and he turned that into a serviette ring. I'm still using it because he died when the bomb went off and the corporal of the stewards in the wardroom said to me 'you were a friend of Stephen York's weren't you, you didn't bring a serviette ring, would you like his?'

I noticed in your CV that I read in the Shore register that you actually took part in D Day. Tell me about that. Were you on Ajax on the day? In the Shore register it talks about a ship called Westralia.

Yes I was on Ajax on D Day. Westralia was later.

What are your memories of that day, June 6 1944?

We were down in Alexandria and we were sent down the Suez Canal to Syria Port (?) the bottom and we took aboard half a dozen pilots, Spitfire pilots and what the hell we were doing with Spitfire pilots we didn't know, we put down into the Gulf of Suez and the gunners started to drop shells into the desert and they were special shells that had been given to us and when they exploded they had

yellow smoke and these pilots were there to see how we did it and what was going to happen because they were going to be Spitfire pilots, we didn't know anything about it on D Day and we came back through the Suez Canal and that's where we started for D Day.



Above: HMS Ajax fires on Gold Beach, late on June 6th 1944.

When were you first told that the invasion was on, it was going to be on this particular time?

Do you know anything about Scotland? We came out of Scapa Flow and round to Cape Roth up the top and down the Irish Sea and the Captain, the Engineer Commander, the Paymaster Commander, the gunnery officer and myself were told, I was told because I was the Senior Watch Keeper and Action Officer of the Watch. I was going to be in it and that's the first time we knew anything about it.

How did you feel about that, what was the feeling on board, was it a sense of excitement?

We didn't know what was going on.

So it was more mystery than anything else.

We had to come right down the coast into the Channel and along the south coast of England and we were passing all sorts of things. Barges with a Bofors (*guns*) on it, you couldn't imagine, see we were doing 23-24 knots, and those things were doing either 5 or 6. We were to be there first, they came in later.

Did the ship go through any training routines prior to the day, specific to D Day?

We were the first British ship in to the landing beach. I did nearly 36 hours straight on the bridge, the skipper was there the compass was here and I was here. I was talking to the engine room and the quarter master.

I've seen photos of what it was like, they said it was the largest armada that ever put to sea.

What was it like?

I cannot describe it, I mean I saw 500 aircraft go (over); the fleet and what went over on D Day. They took trucks and all sorts of things over there.

On Ajax did you carry troops or just artillery?

We were just firing guns but that fuel business was a pipeline that came from the United Kingdom under the channel and came out the landings and that's how they got their fuel. I have seen and read part of the manual for D Day and we and the rest of the British section did what they were told and did it very well. There were the three American beaches, they copped hell, poor sods, they landed on beaches with a cliff like that and they unfortunately were where the enemy were practising to have it out with anybody who landed.

There was one of Rommel's groups down there having some time off and doing some training, just by sheer coincidence.

Yes. Our party, we were the first ship to open fire from the British section right onto the point, there have been quite a few photographs of it, one of my mates here took pictures of the damage of what we did, the German gun emplacements that blew the place up.

How long was Ajax in action? Was it two days, a week?

It was about three days, the first lot we moved up the beaches, we got a storm in the middle of it, we were anchored, we had two anchors down and we still couldn't hold on, and we had to use our engines to keep us there and the Army asked for covering fire ashore and finally they said to us please will you go home because we are falling short.

It would have been very difficult to fire, to get aim when you have been battered by a storm.

That wasn't the worst of it, guns, six inch guns.

After D Day where did Ajax go?

We went back to Pompey port (*Portsmouth*), we had to put new barrels on the guns, they were all worn out, what had happened, when you put six inch guns separate ammunition,on the rear end of the shell there is a copper band and that bites into the lugs of the rifling and We were in Pompey for quite some time; we had to lift the lids of the turrets, drop things in. We then went back to the Med, that's when we got hit by the Stuka.

On D Day, what was the general feeling amongst people that the invasion was on?

I didn't know anybody showing any animation about it, other than it had to happen and the sooner the better. It was no excitement about it; it was just bloody hard work. If ever I said a nasty word against the poms I take it all back, they were incredible. I mean, can you imagine going to work, coming home, having a poor dinner then going to the nearest underground station?

In one part of the network of underground trains in London there is one that goes under the Thames and comes out near the Bank of England and the people were in the tunnel, they didn't

allow them in the tunnel only in the stations and the people were in their bunks, a jerry came over and dropped a bomb, it went through the water of the Thames and blew the tunnel up, drowned the whole lot of them. They never got the people out, they just bricked it up.

You stayed with the Navy, you were in the RAN or The Royal Navy?

I was RANVR, seconded to the Royal Navy that was part of our agreement when we joined. We went back to the Med afterwards and we were up at the top of the Aegean Sea, Greece, and the Admiral came floating up in his 'kip'. Ajax was fitted as a flag ship, he didn't like the ship he was on for some reason, and he decided he would transfer his flag from what he was on to the Ajax. When an Admiral comes aboard he brings all his friends, coxswains and secretary and they came on board and they had a look around. I had a cabin for a long time on my own, I don't know who said what to whom, other than that I was told that 'tomorrow morning you will leave the ship'. I was returned to Australia.

So this was towards the end of the war?

It was late 1944.

Where were you when you learnt of the atomic bomb being dropped in Japan?

I think I was in a tram in Mosman going to work. I came back to Australia and the Navy didn't know what to do with me because by this time I'd had quite some experience as a Lieutenant and the Captain had given me QO status (which is Qualified Officer's Status) which meant I was in all respects considered to be doing the same job as a permanent service Lieutenant of the same rank.

I get back to Australia, I have ten days foreign service leave, I went back to home to Balmoral, and the 1st Lieutenant said "I suppose you have come back to ask for more leave", I said "no, you told me to report today and here I am". They still couldn't find anything for me to do.

Then HMAS Australia was to go back to England for a complete refit and I was to go as her Senior Watch Keeper. I didn't want to go back; I had done nearly four years over there. After D Day there were a few decorations and things sent around and I think there were three mentioned in despatches, I wasn't one of them, nor was the navigator. The old man was as sore as a boil because we'd been on the bridge all the time so he gave me QO Status which meant that I was equal to and if I was promoted before Senior to any permanent officer. I have never heard of anybody else getting (this rank), they must have done so but it is quite unusual.

Did you consider at the end of the war to continue in the Navy as a career?

No, because they defeated themselves about sending me to (HMAS) Australia because they promoted me, I became a Lieutenant Commander and a Watch keeper's job is not a Lieutenant Commander's job, and that's when I went to Westralia.

How long were you with Westralia, what was Westralia?

It was a merchant ship, it used to go from Sydney to Perth but at the beginning of the War she was taken over as a merchant cruiser but she was no good for that- she was too slow. They made her a landing ship and that's what we were doing for the last year or so, going up round the islands. We

took 900 troops up to Japan, BCOF - British Commonwealth Occupation Force- we were going round to islands picking up soldiers and bringing them back to Australia. We had hulls and we could fill them up with all sorts of things and bring them back.

This would have been in 1946?

No, towards the end of the War, 1945. They made me 2nd in command, the skipper's name was Weston and he was the best ship hand I'd ever seen, ever heard of, when we were demobilised he joined the pilot service in Sydney and he became the Senior Pilot.

At the end of the War what profession did you go back in?

They told me I could have stayed in the Navy but I had to drop a rank. I couldn't go back as Lieutenant Commander. I would have had to go back as a Lieutenant, I'd worked hard enough to become that, a two-and-a-half-striper, I wasn't going back, that was enough. I'd had 6 years in the Navy. I went back to work to the same job I had, they had to give it to you, that was the law, so I went into town to see the Manager and I told him I just got married and had a bit of a honeymoon.

The day I came back the Manager said to me "you know, you are a bit of a nuisance, you know we have got everything settled and now you've come back", of course that means my job was not available, "of course it isn't" the manager said. I found out afterwards that the office boy when I left had got my job; he'd wanted it for a long time. They gave me a job as what the Insurance Companies call an Inspector, a Salesman really and some of the Inspectors had to give up part of their territory to take me on. They were very unhappy and what they did, they gave me the worst part, I wasn't doing very good with that, I couldn't sell an ice-cream to anybody, I could settle claims, I was good at that but not good at selling insurance.

So you stayed in that profession, Insurance?

It was very hard to get anything else, unfortunately for me I didn't go back to work immediately I returned to Australia, I still went on, I went to Westralia so a lot of people had got their job and they were nice and settled, I didn't. I know I'm grizzling but that's how it happened and I think what blew the whole thing up was they made me a clerk in the claims section and they also made me the petty cashier.

Did you stay with that till your retirement?

No, when I came in to work one day, I started to check the petty cash and balance it and it wouldn't balance. So I went to see the boss, the Claims Manager, "Oh, he said yes, you weren't there, you were at lunch and I wanted some money". I said have you got a key to that box, he said "yes". "Good, then now you have two and now you have the box because I'm not going to look after cash that somebody else has got access to it" I said. He didn't like it; he had to put up with it. It wasn't long after that, I was still the clerk; the Manager of the CEU sent for me and said we are bringing you inside. You are to be the Manager of the Motor Vehicle Claims and you can keep the company car in case you have to go out and do anything but one of the Junior Assessors will have to use it, he said we are sorry we can't give you any increase in the salary but we'll do what we can. Their settled and you are not going to unsettle them; there I stayed until I retired.

When did you retire, how old were you?

I was 63, I suppose I have some hard feelings but not altogether, I suppose the answer is that I can understand what happened, I was late getting back then they had to make room for me.

Getting back to your time at school, looking back would you say the education you got was a good one?

If you were lucky, yes. If you were unlucky... I went to 2A with Jimmy Burrell as the Master, at the end of the year we were lining up on the asphalt and they called the names out and what classes you were to go to, my name wasn't called out and you had to tell the Sergeant Major that your name wasn't there and they put you where they could fit you. If you'd been in the A class you might be lucky to get in to B class more than likely you would get in one of the C forms. My father went to see Purves and he said 'if you don't like the way we do things you can take your son away'. So whether you liked it or not you stayed there. Do you remember David Davies, he was the Padre, deaf as a post, played halfback for Wales but as a teacher he wasn't worth a bull's foot?.

You are right, when talking to some of the Old Boys there was certainly in the 30's 40's and 50's, there was a big divide between teachers who were Masters and who were good at what they did and one's who were just there and filling in time to get their money.

David Davies, that's all he was, he was the Padre, a great trick was put up your hand with a piece of paper and say "piss in the box Sir?" he'd say "put it in the box". Another one who was not much good also was Buck Jones, nice man. Does anybody remember Dick Dickson, Waso Dickson, he was President of The Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron, he was a big fellow and there were two brothers, Partners, Jack and Bob Harkness, they weren't nasty but they were naughty and they'd play up with these Masters. There were several, you wouldn't know Ouvrier (*A Ouvrier*), "Ouv third class", whether he was French he wasn't good but people liked Bagot.

Did you make lifelong friends at Shore?

No, I didn't, I did in a couple of places, one was John Orr who had rowed 7 in the VIII and was called "Devil"Orr. He was a nice villain and he wasn't in the best of health eventually, he came up to Ballina and he and his wife bought up there and we had moved up to Kiera because my mother had died and Muriel, my wife had looked after her for many years and her mother was in a bad way in Brisbane and I thought it was only fair to get up to there and that's where we got to. I used to go down once a fortnight to see John Orr and his wife and mine got on well together.

You didn't really keep in touch with too many of your school mates?

No

Nic Foord : Did you have children?

Two, Margaret was the elder and Zoe was the younger one. Both pleasant, good nice children. I had an aunt, my mother's sister, Zoe Emma Birtles who was the most brilliant person I have ever met, she went to University and she stayed with us at first, came down from Quirindi and she was sitting for her BA and one of the Professors there said "If you do one more subject you can get another degree". She got a BA, BE, Economics Degree, both with Honours and she was the first woman to

get an Honours degree in the Sydney University. She went to work in the library and she was offered the Librarianship of Sydney, she said "I won't take it; it's a man's job".

Where are your daughters living now?

One lives in Sydney, Margaret, she was the Secretary for Professor Chapman at IVF. Her name is Margaret Kennedy. Zoe Conlon married a Pom but he is a bonza bloke, he and I get on very well and they live in Brisbane.

How long have you been here at Banora Point?

I was at 30 years at Terranora Road, Banora Point and in the unit about 4-5 years. My eldest daughter is coming up from Sydney and bringing her husband, and the youngest will be here on Saturday morning, Saturday morning is their day.

Do you have many grandchildren?

My elder daughter has three children, a daughter and two sons. The elder daughter went to University, twice, and got two Masters Degrees in Psychology. I failed in the Leaving Certificate, do you know why? Because I sat for the English paper, what was Shakespeare thinking when he wrote Julius Caesar, how the bloody hell did I know all this? Christians like that, poor old Buck Jones had been my English Master and he wasn't going to win. Did anyone know "Mopo" Hedges (*J H Hedges, also an Old Boy*), he was Coach of the 1st XI and the 1st XI did very well but he was a good teacher, he could teach me English but not Buck.

Richard Clive: Who was the Captain of the 2nd XV when you were in the Rugby?

Don't know who Fisher is? Eldershaw had a lot to do with it, if he didn't like you, you didn't do very well.

Richard Clive: We know his son very well, John Eldershaw.

I have seen his name in the Reports.

Richard Clive: You know Eve Bagnall very well with John, do they keep in touch with you?

Yes, but I don't know anyone up here that went to Shore.

I didn't offer you a cup of tea nor anything but would you like a glass of Scotch?

Interview ended at 5.30 pm.

Editor's Note: Sadly John passed away on 9th October 2013. His obituary, taken from the SMH, is below.



**READ, John Evans.
RANVR**

Late of Banora Point
Formerly of Sydney.

Passed away peacefully on
09.10.2013

Aged 104 years.

Loved husband of Muriel
(dec'd), father of Margaret
(Sydney) and Zoe
(Brisbane), father-in-law of
Paul and Roger,
grandfather of Joanne,
Mark, Glenn and Matthew.

Shore's oldest old boy has
rowed his final race.

Our sincere thanks to the
staff and village residents
of RSL Care Darlington
and his many friends who
have cared for him so
kindly over the past few
years. His ashes will be
spread on his beloved
Sydney Harbour.

Privately Cremated.