

## St. Mary's High School - 1941- 1946



This Gothic-arched, single storey building was to be my March to December home for the next six years. During 1941 it was developed so that a smallish centre-section was made into a two storey block and since then there have been many other buildings constructed, spoiling my mental picture of the place yet developing it sufficiently to bring in much-needed revenue for the continuance of educational activities and to house the students who currently number over three hundred. In 1941 there were only 85 or so boarders and literally four or five day-boys, nearly all of whom were princes from the local palaces. In 1946, my last year, we were a school of 102 boys and six day-boys.

Off to the left of the main block lies the Masters' House and further up the hill was another small house for one or two masters who were not Brothers but lay teachers. To the right of the main block and down a few steps was the electrical-generator plant house combined with the engineer's quarters.

On the same level as the school but slightly to the rear and to the left were the "bogs". In the valley to the rear of the school lay the bakery and deeper in the valley, after 1942, "Roe's Folly" which was an attempt at digging a water well. Brother Roe, the Principal of the school from 1942, had considered himself an expert at divining a source of water with a couple of sticks. The attempts at digging the well and blasting the rocks which the labourers kept on coming against again and again, went on until Roe left in 1944. Today it stands as a one hundred foot deep and twenty-foot diameter relic of stupidity and a reminder to a stubborn and sulky old fool. — I would say that wouldn't I; I was the recipient, on at least two occasions, of "six-of the best", from the "crap-bag".

Behind the bogs and down the "khud" lay the servants' quarters and the "dhobi ghat". From there a jagged and steep path led down to the lower playing field, a quarter of a mile distant, and thence to the "School Lake" which didn't belong to us at all but which we had named and commandeered. The lake only filled up in the monsoon and was only good for swimming in for a couple of months after the monsoon had ended even though it still had plenty of water in it. Being still water it was very prone to harbouring malaria mosquitoes. As a result, most of the time we swam it was during the monsoon while it was pouring with rain and quite cold.

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The first couple of days at school were spent settling in, learning the school routines and getting to know the other fellows. After that it was full speed ahead with activities. The time-

table for activities left us with less than half an hour a day to ourselves. We'd get up at seven-thirty in the morning to a series of loud claps from the Brother in charge and fall, immediately, on to our knees for morning prayers. We spent half an hour getting washed in cold water, though some of the senior fellows who had started shaving were allowed to get a mug-full of hot water from the generator cooling tank, and then dressing for daily mass in the chapel.

Directly from there we would go to "chota hazri" (small breakfast) and finish that by eight thirty. There followed half an hour to make up the beds and do a bit of prep for the start of classes at nine. At eleven thirty we would break for "breakfast" and then at twelve we would fit in another half hour of prep before the afternoon classes. At three thirty we finished classes and went to tea for half an hour and then our only free half hour of the day, though we had to use part of this time to change into our sports kit.

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Then we would play games — soccer in the rainy season and hockey or cricket the rest of the year — for one and a half hours. Back to school to wash and change our clothes for study.

We would have dinner and then go back to the classrooms for another hour of "night study". Thence to the chapel to say the rosary — half an hour — and then half an hour queuing up to take a pee before returning to the dormitory. There we would fall on our knees again for night prayers and then retire to bed at around 10.30, totally "shagged".

On Wednesdays and Sundays we had a library afternoon and instead of games we would go for a jungle-walk or else into the town. I started off in Standard IV and didn't even think about the years I would have to be in the school until Senior Cambridge (Std.XI) The routines and discipline were familiar to me from the other boarding schools I had been to.

Within a few days I became aware that we were being educated by, for the most part, a bunch of "Sadists", who would brook neither nonsense nor any failure to study. They all looked like mature men and a few of them were, but the majority of them were relatively young blokes in their twenties.

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All the Brothers carried around a leather strap, about a foot and a half long and, with several thin layers stitched together, about half an inch thick. The strap was concealed in the deep pockets of their habits and were regarded as day-to-day, in fact minute to minute, weapons of punishment. It was not uncommon to get a normal ration of ten whacks in a morning or afternoon session. In 1945, one of the boys in our class, Noel Whyte, was so thrashed in one morning session, collecting 42 lashes, that in the lunch break he "went over the wall" and ran away from school. The responsible Brother, Costello, had to spend the whole afternoon being driven up and down the road to Abu Road in an attempt to catch him and bring him back.

Noel successfully evaded capture by hiding in the jungle and behind rocks until, crossing the open stretch at the bottom of the hills and the start of the plains, he had to break cover and was caught. He was brought back to the school and expelled. I met him in London in a night club twenty six years later. He was a successful cartoonist with the "Daily Mirror". Expulsion, fortunately, hadn't affected his chances in life.