

TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

The teaching of technical subjects began in 1929 in the basement of the main building. Soon after the establishment of the course it was inspected by “Wm S Austin” of the Education Department¹, who reported: “the new workroom has only recently been brought into use ... the interior is well finished, the lighting is good ... and the equipment which is supplied on a liberal scale is of good quality ... special provision has been made for drawing, ...”

And:

“the training is under the special direction of Mr Trendall ... himself taking over two classes each for one period, the remaining classes being under the instruction of Mr Smith an instructor in the service of the Auckland Education Board ...”

And finally:

“Special attention is given to the backward pupils both those who are naturally slow and those who have little or no preliminary ... the keenness of the boys and the excellent discipline ... were impressive features.”

At year’s end the Headmaster reported² on:

“... the very fact of having to provide a semi-technical course emphasises the wastage of effort that has always been the bane of every Secondary School. Each year brings the saddening spectacle of a small army of misfits and disappointments, pupils who, setting out with brightest hopes, fall sooner or later beneath the burden of tasks uncongenial or beyond their powers to bear ... [their] efforts must meet with nothing but failure and what variation of their work we can make still does not release them from subjects that are intolerable and misdirected.”

It was to be 18 years before metalwork began. The second headmaster received a letter from the Chief Inspector of Secondary Schools³ stating:

“You will no doubt have received an intimation that a grant of £1,420 has been approved towards the provision of metalwork equipment for your school ...”

Caradus’ advocacy for technical (and every kind of) matériel was tireless. Once the metalwork shop was a going concern he wrote to the Department⁴ soliciting their help “in the supply of forge equipment” then enquiring, somewhat disingenuously, “... I thought perhaps you knew of some War Assets stock that could be made available to us.” And then proceeded to provide a list of things he wanted.

Despite a scathing Departmental report on metalwork in 1949⁵ Caradus soon sought approval for the school to present boys for Engineering Shopwork Theory and Practice for School Certificate⁶ and the very next day he wrote to someone else⁷ claiming:

“The drawing work that is an essential part of the new engineering course has at present to be done in the engineering shop. This is a very undesirable and against accepted practice ... I shall require next year more accommodation for Drawing and Design.

The Inspectors’ Report of 1954 was, by comparison with that of 1949, glowing⁸. Also, in 1954, 145 boys were doing woodwork and were being prepared for School Certificate Carpentry and Joinery as well as hobby classes, “held in the luncheon hour for boys who do not take Woodwork as a normal subject.”⁹

¹ Wm. S Austin, Inspectors’ Notes on certain Manual Training classes at Mount Albert Grammar School. Dept. of Ed. 26 July 1929.

² F.W. Gamble, Headmaster’s Report in *School List*, 1929 pp. 21-22.

³ H. Henderson, CISS, letter to W. Caradus, 1 September 1947.

⁴ W. Caradus, letter to R. Hines, Dept. of Ed. Wellington, 15 April 1948.

⁵ W.C.J. Perry, et al. Inspectors of Post Primary Schools, Report, Dept. of Ed. 2 June 1949.

⁶ W. Caradus, letter to Superintendent of Ed. 27 June 1950.

⁷ W. Caradus Letter to District Admin. Officer. 28 June 1950.

⁸ K.J. Sheen, et al. Inspector of Post Primary Schools, Report, Dept. of Ed. 4 June 1954.

⁹ R.G. Smyth. Woodwork report prepared for Inspectors’ visit. May 1954

Facilities were beginning to age. An unnamed contributor to *The Albertian* noted¹⁰ that: “Overlooking the playing fields stands the engineering classroom, drab and grey, flanking an asphalt luncheon area. You wonder at first what the building is meant to be – a storeroom, a garage, a toolshed, surely not a classroom with all those cobwebs, broken windows and the dark interior.”

A new technical block opened in 1964 and what was called Woodwork, Metalwork (or Engineering Shopwork), and Technical Drawing, were in the one place.

The new building was a far cry from its origins in the basement beside the tractor garage. Much of the basement became a table-tennis room, then the tuck-shop and a seventh-from common room plus offices for careers and guidance, then a temporary staff room, and in its latest iteration it is several classrooms, the uniform shop and storage areas for records of past pupils.

There has been a cavalcade of people in charge of what has become Technology. The inaugural Mr Trendall (the eccentric Drawing Master) and the borrowed Mr Smith gave way to Mr JH Jenkin who had legendary woodworking skills. In 1941 a Mr AW Perkin became a part-time master and then he was full-time in 1946. The following year he was the man in charge of woodwork and Jack Jenkin was back to teaching Art. The following year Mr Perkin was listed as being in charge of both woodwork and metalwork – its first appearance thanks to the £1,420, a welcome gift, unlike the epidemic of poliomyelitis that closed all schools in New Zealand in the first term of 1948. In 1950 there was a split, Mr Perkin kept woodwork but *The Albertian* reported¹¹ that: “Mr T.D. Davies, M.I.Mar.E. is now in charge of the Metalwork Shop ...” by the middle of 1953 Mr Perkin had gone and woodwork was under the aegis of Mr RG Smyth. In 1954 TD Davies was replaced by DE Davies (no relation).

In 1958 Mr Waller arrived to be in charge of woodwork. Fred Waller and Dave Davies were a wonderful team. Many hundreds of boys passed through their workshops and countless numbers went on to apprenticeships and became successful tradesmen. Mr Davies retired in 1972 but Mr Waller soldiered on until 1981 and with increasing numbers of technical teachers, Fred was the first true HOD.

Mr R Kerry then took charge, followed by Mr TM Cole, Mr C Lee, Mr MC Boulton, then the job-sharing Mr AJ Hawkins and Mr AE Hooper, then Mr DJ Dobson, followed by the first woman to lead the Department, Mrs NMF Brodie, HOD in 2005 and then HOF in 2006. ‘Faculty’ better represented the true picture than ‘Department’ and Natalia Brodie, more than any other person, gave girls a growing voice in Technology. Her unique background gave her skills in two diverse fields, metalworker and patternmaker/dress designer.

At the time of writing, Theo van Zyl is HOF, all Year 9s have a year of Technology in both Product Design and Visual Communication. In Year 10 these subjects are options. From Year 11 on the subject choices are: Design and Visual Communication, Mechanical Engineering, Building and Carpentry, Food and Hospitality.

The Technology Faculty, with its modern courses, gifted and encouraging staff and committed students, and the special relationship which allows senior students to hone their skills at Unitec, is a huge step-change from ‘Manual Training’ as an escape-hatch for those who found the hard grind of academe uncongenial.

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¹⁰ Anon. *The Albertian*, 1960 p29.

¹¹ Anon. *The Albertian*, 1950, p3.