

WILFORD SCHOOL 1927 — 1977

Wilford School was built on the site of the Wilford Estate during 1927, consisting of four classrooms. Classes commenced on October 27 with an initial roll of 143, under acting Principal Mr J.F.C. Hiddlestone and a staff of three teachers. The school was officially opened on November 30 by the Hon. T.M. Wilford, and by the end of the year the roll had risen to 166.

Commencing 1928 with the roll increased to 222 by new entrants, conditions became very cramped and by the end of March the roll stood at 230. On 4th April, the head was instructed by the Wellington Education Board to transfer a number of children to Petone Central; as a result the roll was reduced to 179 by the 23rd April.

Representations were being made at this time by the Education Board to the Government for three extra classrooms, the reply being that due to economic conditions, this was not possible. Further pressure from parents and the School Committee, complaining at overcrowding, the fact that their children were being forced to travel the extra distance to Petone Central finally brought matters to a head and in November 1929 the Minister of Education approved the erection of two additional classrooms, cloakrooms, a head teachers room and a much needed staffroom. These additions were completed by April 1930.

The roll rose steadily year by year until 1937 when the roll reached 426. In this year the infant department was completed, bringing the number of classrooms to 8. At this point it is of interest to note that the present school roll is almost the same as that of 1937, however, pupils are now housed in fourteen classrooms.

The face of the school was to change again in 1954 with the planning for an assembly hall. The history of the purchasing and erection of a hall for the school is recorded in detail in the school committee records. For some years previously, the school galas and other fund raising activities had been building up to provide the necessary finance. What the records do not show is the tremendous amount of work and the long hours of negotiating that was undertaken by the School Committee Chairman Mr D.N. Hull and members of the committee, with the Education Board, the eventual contractors G. Waggstaff Limited, The Minister of Education Mr Algie, and the M.P. for Petone Mr Moohan.

The building was originally the No. 2 mess room and kitchen block from the Petone Workers Industrial Camp. Negotiations for the purchase of the building were opened on 7th December 1953 by a joint committee of Wilford and Upper Hutt Schools, who were to have half of the building each.

It was intended to cut the building in half, and each committee would then arrange separately to have their half transferred to the new sites on the respective school grounds. The whole project was to be supervised by the Education Board Architect, and plans and specifications for the erecting of the hall would be drawn up by the Board.

Still requiring funds, the committee decided to hold a house-to-house canvas for contributions from householders, to bring the cash total up to 2000 pounds (\$4,000), at which point they qualified for a 2 to 1 subsidy from the Government.

It is not recorded which day erection of the hall commenced, but disaster struck on the morning of 17th July 1954 when the partially completed building collapsed in ruins after being buffeted by strong winds and heavy rain, also damaging the roof of the main school building.

Re-building of the hall commenced almost immediately, materials that could be salvaged being used where possible. The structure, particularly roof trusses, were strengthened, however, the whole building programme became a rather protracted affair, taking much longer than was originally planned. The hall was finally completed, apart from a few minor jobs about February 1955, and the opening ceremony was held on Saturday 26th March at 7.45 p.m. The Official opening was performed by the MP. for Petone Mr M. Moohan, others present including the Mayor of Petone Mr Huggan, the Town Clerk Mr H. Lang, Mr Deavoll from the Education Board and Mr Waggstaff for the contractors.

The hall remains basically the same today, the major addition being the ceiling which was put up in 1971. The total cost of the hall project was \$12,324, of which the school committee and home and school association had raised approximately \$4,000.

In 1961 the School Committee accepted a tender of \$2,266 to build a swimming pool, which is sited at the eastern boundary of the school grounds. In recent years, the pool has been greatly improved, firstly by adding modern new dressing sheds, gas heating units, widening and lengthening the pool and finally this year, completely closing in and roofing the whole complex. The total cost of these improvements is in the order of \$21,000.

During 1973, the Education Board undertook a major reconstruction of the main block of the school to bring the facilities up to modern teaching and education requirements. Ex pupils prior to this year will notice the increase in the size of the classrooms and in particular the fine library, teachers staffroom, and administration quarters. Thanks to efforts of subsequent school committees and home and school association committees, this re-model is equipped with some of the most modern teaching aids available today.