

Greensborough Local Swimming Hole – Nancy Fowkes (nee O’Neill)

From our first Greensborough house which was in Lorimer Street behind the School you could go down to Church Street and at the end of Church Street under the railway bridge was the river which had a deep hole for swimming. Church Street has now been cut off by the complex and the area under the bridge is called Whatmough Park.

My brother John recollects that there were also two swimming pools in the Plenty River (built in 1936/7). The shallow pool (closest to the bridge) was just above waist deep on him when he was about 10 years old and it was completely concrete all the way around. The big pool was upstream from the little one and it had a concrete wall and concrete walkway on the opposite side from the town and the side closest to the town was natural dirt riverbank where they used to jump and dive off a tree on that side.

The summer of 1953/4 must have been very dry because there was hardly any water in the river at the Church Street swimming hole.

I was 4 years old and had my appendix removed and there were complications so I was bandaged heavily around the middle with the heat affecting me badly.

Mum (May) took my brothers John and Andy and I for a swim in the gravelly river hole but I was only allowed to paddle for fear of getting the bandages wet. There really wasn’t enough water to swim and there were quite a few families there that day but the other children managed to get under and cool off so I was envious.

On the way home I felt very sorry for my mother and brothers because I wasn’t well enough to walk and my pram had to be pushed up the steep hill with the unmade roads being very rough.

Oral History

A day or two later Dads came home and told Mum that Dr Cordner had declared there was to be no more swimming in the river because it was making the children sick. (This was not the first time the river had been declared unfit for swimming.)

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The next year I started at Greensborough State School and to have swimming lessons the children would walk to the railway station and catch the train to

Eltham which is where I obtained my Herald, Junior and Senior Swimming Certificates. I made good use of the outdoor pool in Greensborough when it opened in 1964.

Later in life I became a Vicswim Teacher as did my daughter Tristi who taught swimming at Carlton Baths when she was attending Melbourne University.

My brother John also recollects that when he went to Secondary School his class was the founding class of Watsonia Technical School. They sent his class to Heidelberg Tech for the first year (they were in a Church hall) and the new school building opened a year later at Watsonia with form one and two.

The only thing that sticks in his mind is his involvement in the school swimming team. They were a new school with only two forms but when they went to the inter school sports swimming against all the other schools with three forms, they won the sports.

He clearly remembers the Principal and Headmaster being absolutely gobsmacked at the Monday morning assembly. All of the swimmers including him were called out to the front and the whole school cheered.