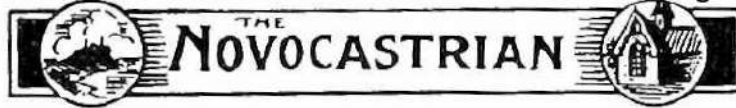


Speech Nights at NBHS began in 1932, for which there was no printed programme. They became speech days in 1965. The final event was held in 1973, with this portentous comment appearing in the Novocastrian of that Year: "Such a static and stultifying ceremony must go!"



May 1932

SPEECH NIGHT

The small boy may well sniff and turn up his nose! Obviously the name is sufficient to inform any well balanced intellect that this sort of function is sure to be "state, flat and unprofitable," and all Speech Nights are the same.

But are they? Quite a number of boys seemed to take it for granted that a Speech Night must, of necessity, be a dry and boring proceeding, which can be best enjoyed from a distance. We are glad to say that they were in this case quite mistaken, and that there is no recorded instance of even a first-year boy going to sleep. Of course the fifth-years were models of quiet attention, apparently conserving their energies for a noisy and fearsome rendering of a war-cry, which possessed, as usual, the great virtue of utter unintelligibility.

The lights were lit, the doors were opened, the people trooped in and the proceedings began with the Mayor in the chair, and the stage nearly as crowded as the hall.

Mr. Harkness, the Chief Inspector of Schools, rose to speak, and an anticipatory shudder, ran round the audience, only to be replaced by an intense interest when a most entertaining talk on education at home and abroad was delivered. All were sorry when he reached the end of his discourse.

The Headmaster's report followed, and revealed an enrolment of 708, an increase of 141 on the previous year, and foreshadowed an even greater increase this year. In the Leaving Certificate, 60 candidates were successful and 16 honours were gained. In the Intermediate, 105 boys passed, the highest aggregate being obtained by Ralph C. Wilson.

In spite of great financial difficulties, sport was carried on with the usual vigour and success. Thanks were tendered to the donors of prizes, the Parents and Citizens' Association, the old Novocastrians Union, the visiting clergy, the Press, parents and all others who assisted the school.

The James and Elizabeth Meickle Memorial Prizes, donated by Mrs. Chichester, were won by J. M. Edgar and Miss Elva Martin. The Sefton Prize went to Ralph C. Wilson and the Business Man's Prize, by a happy thought, was awarded for outstanding school service, the deserving winner being Les. Hannell. Many other prizes were presented to their proud recipients, while the less fortunate looked on and applauded generously. Some lads were seen literally staggering home. The inclusion of a wheelbarrow among the trophies would have been appreciated.

A presentation was made to Mr. Harvey by the Parents and Citizens' Association, and many were the gasps of admiration, when the cut glass reading lamp was exposed to view. The problem of the inscription was solved by hanging a little silver plate round its neck by means of a small silver chain in just the same manner as King Billy is decorated.

The musical programme was very varied, ranging over about four complete octaves in the case of the vocal items, while hardly a single note on the whole keyboard of the grand piano was left undusted.

At last the end came, and off went parents and pupils, proud of their association with the school, pitying rather than blaming those boys who did not feel disposed to attend the greatest event in our school year. A happy innovation was the supper provided by the P. and C. Association in the reception room of the Town Hall. Here further speeches followed, extempore and entertaining, and in the words of England's greatest poet, "a good time was had by all."

An untaught man is but himself alone, and as lonely in his ends and destiny as any beast. A man instructed is a man enlarged from that narrow prison of self to participation in an undying life, that began we know not when, that grows above and beyond the greatness of the stars.

—H. G. Wells. The Undying Fire.