

## Joseph Noel Pruden



Joseph Noel Pruden was the first Head Teacher at St Albans East State School in 1956. He was aged about 40 and had been a teacher in the primary school system for at least 20 years.

Joseph Noel Pruden was born in Sale in 1916 to George Pruden and Susan Philomena Duffy. The Pruden ancestry goes back to 1808 in Peterborough, Northamptonshire, England. The Duffy ancestry goes back to 1810 in Ireland. George Pruden and Susan Philomena Duffy married at St Mary's in Sale in 1906 and raised two sons: George Geoffrey (1907) and Joseph Noel (1916) who was often known as Noel. The Pruden family of Sale became graziers and butchers. George jnr continued the family tradition as a grazier, but Noel became a teacher.

By 1936, at age 20, Noel Pruden was junior teacher at the Sale Elementary School. In June he had the misfortune of breaking his leg while playing with St Paul's Football Club. In December he had the good fortune of being selected for a studentship at the Teachers' Training College in Melbourne. He was appointed head teacher at the State school at Tongio (Gippsland) from 1938 to 1940, and later occupied a similar position at Upper Maffra West (Gippsland).

Mr George Pruden senior died in 1939 at age 60 years:

*"Profound regret will be felt over a wide area of Gippsland at the death of Mr. George Pruden who passed away at his residence in Sale yesterday morning after a comparatively brief illness. ... In stock circles he was an authority and his opinion and advice was eagerly sought by those engaged in the industry. His judgment was not confined to stock, for he was an excellent judge of a horse, particularly a racehorse and in this connection his experience was wide and varied. He owned, trained, raced and rode trotters, ponies, jumpers and flat-racers and was always regarded as a particularly shrewd judge. His principal successes as an owner were when in association with Mr. F. B. Brennan he won the Grand National Hurdle race on two occasions with Realm and Lady Quiz respectively. He was partial to jumpers and met with considerable success with steeplechasers."*<sup>1</sup>

Noel Pruden's teaching career was interrupted by World War Two when he enlisted in the Air Force in 1941. He was posted to the R.A.A.F. initial training school in South Australia and completed courses in Elementary Flying Training Schools in New South Wales. He was posted abroad in September 1941 and received his flying badge in Canada in 1942. He was posted to England in March 1942, until returning to Australia in 1943. He served as Second Pilot and Captain on 12 makes of aircraft. He was noted as being a sound pilot who became a reliable officer *"who very satisfactorily carried out all allotted duties."*

When he was due to leave for Canada in August 1941 the community wished him well:

*"L.A.C. J. N. (Noel) Pruden was the recipient of a wallet and steel mirror from the citizens of Sale, which were presented to him by the Mayor (Cr. J. E. Thomson) on behalf of the A.I.F. Presentation Fund. In making the presentation the Mayor assured L.A.C. Pruden that the gift was a token of the esteem in which the Citizens of Sale held him, and he hoped he would have good flying and a safe and happy landing. L.A.C. Pruden also received a parcel from the girls of the Sale Kit Bag Club, who wished him the best of good fortune."*<sup>2</sup>

Pruden kept in contact with people through correspondence and receiving local newspapers. In August 1942 he was with the R.A.A.F. in England, and wrote:

*"... of the anxiety of Australian airmen to return to operations in Australia. 'It has been a wonderful adventure,' he writes; 'a three or four weeks' pleasure cruise in the Pacific; four months flying in Canada and the States; a fortnight's leave in New York; in a convoy across the Atlantic for fourteen days, and now in England - beautiful rural England, but it's cities leave much to be desired.' Flying conditions are vastly different here from those in the larger land*

<sup>1</sup> Gippsland Times 2 February 1939 p1

<sup>2</sup> Gippsland Times 8 September 1941 p1

*masses, he says. Rapid changes of weather and more thickly populated countryside make a difference and one has to re-adapt oneself as quickly as possible.*"<sup>3</sup>

Pilot Officer J N Pruden was back in Australia by mid 1944 as that's when he married Elaine May Bant:

*"A wedding which created considerable local interest was that celebrated at Christ Church, Omeo, on Saturday evening last, when Elaine May, daughter of Mr. C. J. Bant, Omeo, and the late Mrs. Bant, was married to Pilot Officer Joseph Noel Pruden, youngest son of Mrs. G. Pruden, Sale, and the late Mr. George Pruden."*<sup>4</sup>

Elaine May Bant was born in Geelong in 1920 to Christopher John Bant and Elsie Alice Clift. The Bant heritage goes back to the 1600s in Lezant, Cornwall, England. The Clift heritage goes back to 1807 in Basingstoke, Hampshire, England.

Pruden's appointment to the RAAF was terminated in June 1945 when he was declared permanently medically unfit. He was awarded the 1939-45 Star, Africa Star, Pacific Star, and Defence Medal.

In 1949 Noel and Elaine Pruden were living in Marley Street, Sale, and Noel was again a teacher. They had good social connections: Elaine was a member of St Paul's Tennis Club, Noel was with Apex, and they were both with the Sale Golf Club. However, they were looking for change and moved to Omeo to take over a business. Perhaps this venture was not successful as after six months they returned to Sale and Noel rejoined the staff of the Sale Primary School.

Noel Pruden was transferred to Kinglake West early in 1950, and by mid-1951 they had relocated to Sunshine in Melbourne's western suburbs, with the Gippsland Times reporting that:

*"Mrs Noel Pruden, who has been recuperating after illness with relatives in Sale, returned to Sunshine with her husband yesterday."*<sup>5</sup>

In 1954 the family's home was in Ballarat Road, Sunshine. Their children were a son Marc (born in 1946) and a daughter Eve (born in 1951). In 1955 a new primary school was being built in Station Avenue, St Albans, and Mr Pruden was appointed to oversee its development – as the family were now based in Sunshine, it was a relatively short commute to work in St Albans.



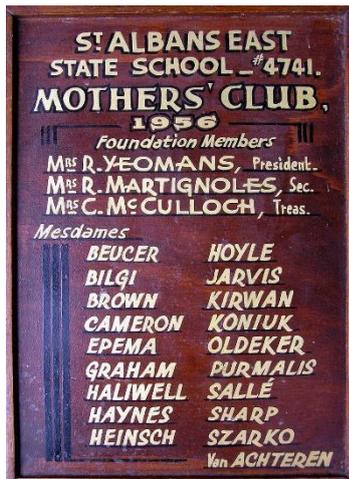
<sup>3</sup> Gippsland Times 17 August 1942 p2

<sup>4</sup> Bairnsdale Advertiser 11 July 1944 p6

<sup>5</sup> Gippsland Times 2 July 1951 p3

In 1956 Pruden was the Head Teacher at the newly-built St Albans East Primary School. He was at the school for a year, but for some reason his position was classified as Temporary. William John Carney took over in 1957 and he was noted as being the first Permanent Head Teacher at the school. However, it was Pruden who was the operations manager in establishing State School #4741 as the third primary school in the district that was experiencing substantial population growth:

*"Temporary HT, J. Noel Prudden, enrolled 370 children transferred from SS2969, representing Grades 1-5, on 13th February 1956 and, with staff and parents assisting, began the onerous task of moulding a school on their share of basalt plains that was St Albans. During 1956 heavy rains turned the school area into a quagmire and closure was narrowly averted. For years the surrounding roads were unmade and consequently, during wet weather, children and staff alike trudged around in thick mud. In 1956, 83% of the scholars came from migrant families from twenty-three countries and 60% of these were handicapped by a language problem."*



Pruden established the school's Mothers' Club in 1956, and their Foundation Members Names Board is the earliest 'Honour Board' of local women who worked as volunteers to create an important link between school and community. The executive members were Mrs Yeomans (President), Mrs Martignoles (Secretary), Mrs McCulloch (Treasurer), and the other committee members were Mesdames Beucer, Bilgi, Brown, Cameron, Epema, Graham, Haliwell, Haynes, Heinsch, Hoyle, Jarvis, Kirwan, Koniuk, Oldeker, Purmalis, Salle, Sharp, Szarko, and Van Achteren. They were a multicultural team reflecting the growing ethnic diversity of the neighbourhood..

In 1963 the Prudens were living in Echuca and Noel and had been promoted to Inspector of Schools; he was aged in his late 40s, so he had progressed quite successfully in the education department hierarchy. Between 1967 and 1980 they were living in Kew North and Noel was a school inspector. He would have been in his mid-60s at this

stage and perhaps looking to retire.

Joseph Noel Pruden died in Kew in October 1997 at age 80 and was buried at the Springvale Botanical Cemetery.

Elaine May Pruden nee Bant died in 2017 at age 96 and was buried at the Springvale Botanical Cemetery.

Joseph Ribarow  
December 2025