Girls, Empowerment and Education: 
A History of The Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School 
1905–2005

A thesis submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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November 2006
Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; and, any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged.

Pauline F Parker

25 November 2006
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There are many people who supported me selflessly and enthusiastically throughout this research project, and without them I wonder whether I would have found the courage and strength to complete the history. Imagine being informed a year into the project that your postgraduate student has been diagnosed with cancer, and, three years later, that her partner of thirty years has been diagnosed with terminal cancer, dying six weeks later. It takes special people to cope with such unexpected events. In many ways my personal experience interacted with my research as I sought to understand others’ lives, and the meanings they gave to their experience and memories of experience. I am deeply grateful for every experience during the past four years.

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Summary

Despite the considerable significance of publicly funded education in the making of Australian society, state school histories are few in number. In comparison, most corporate and private schools have cemented their sense of community and tradition through full-length publications. To redress this imbalance, the Australian Research Council provided funding to enable the history of Victoria’s only selective state high school for girls, The Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School, to be written.

The history of the school is important in itself, because it can trace its origins back to 1905, to the beginnings of state secondary education when the Melbourne Continuation School (MCS), later Melbourne High School (MHS) was established. For this reason, the history project enjoyed the firm and enthusiastic support of the school community, the Department of Education and Training (DE&T) and RMIT University. But the project also had wider significance: it could trace strands of the development of girls’ education in Victoria, thus examining the significance and dynamics of single-sex schooling, the education of girls more generally, and, importantly, girls’ own experiences (and memories of experiences) of secondary schooling, as well as the meaning they made of those experiences. Since it is now recognised that there are substantial state, regional and other differences between schools and their local communities, studies of individual schools are needed to underpin more general overviews of particular issues.

‘Girls, Education and Empowerment: A History of The Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School 1905–2005’, departs from traditional models of school history writing that tend to focus on the decision-makers and bureaucrats in education as well as documenting the most ‘successful’ former students who have made their mark in the world. Drawing on numerous narrative sources and documentary evidence, this history is organised thematically to contextualise and examine what is was like, and meant, to be a girl at this school (Melbourne Continuation School 1905–12; Melbourne High School 1912–27; Melbourne Girls’ High School 1927–34, and Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School from 1934) during a century of immense social, economic, political and educational change.
Speech night 1955 at the Melbourne Town Hall
Melbourne Continuation School students at Werribee Gorge 1907
**Abbreviations**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>ANZHES</td>
<td>Australia and New Zealand History of Education Society</td>
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<td>BRW</td>
<td>Business Review Weekly</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEGGS</td>
<td>Church of England Girls’ Grammar School</td>
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<td>DP</td>
<td>Deputy Principal</td>
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<td>HSC</td>
<td>Higher School Certificate</td>
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<tr>
<td>IASTV</td>
<td>Incorporated Association of Secondary School Teachers of Victoria</td>
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<td>Mac.Rob</td>
<td>Mac. Robertson Girls’ High School</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘Matric’</td>
<td>Matriculation</td>
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<tr>
<td>MLC</td>
<td>Methodist Ladies’ College</td>
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<td>MCS</td>
<td>Melbourne Continuation School</td>
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<td>MGHSH</td>
<td>Melbourne Girls’ High School</td>
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<td>MHS</td>
<td>Melbourne High School</td>
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<tr>
<td>MLA</td>
<td>Member of the Legislative Assembly</td>
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<tr>
<td>MLC</td>
<td>Methodist Ladies’ College</td>
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<td>MPI</td>
<td>Minister of Public Instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>PLC</td>
<td>Presbyterian Ladies’ College</td>
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<tr>
<td>RMIT</td>
<td>Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology</td>
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<td>RMPI</td>
<td>Report of the Minister of Public Instruction</td>
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<td>SMH</td>
<td>Sydney Morning Herald</td>
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<td>SRC</td>
<td>Students’ Representative Council</td>
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<td>TER</td>
<td>Tertiary Entrance Ranking</td>
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<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<td>VCE</td>
<td>Victorian Certificate of Education</td>
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<td>Victorian High School Teachers’ Association</td>
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<td>VP</td>
<td>Vice Principal</td>
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<td>VPRS</td>
<td>Victorian Public Record Series</td>
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Introducing Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School

Situated in the affluent, leafy suburb of Albert Park, nestled between Port Phillip Bay and one of Melbourne’s busiest arterial roads, Kings Way, is Victoria’s only selective-entry state high school for girls, The Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School (Mac.Rob). This school can trace its origins back to 1905 to the opening of the Melbourne Continuation School (MCS) in Spring Street—Victoria’s first state post-elementary school, renamed Melbourne High School (MHS) in 1912. Melbourne High School split along gender lines in 1927 and two single-sex schools were created—Melbourne Girls’ High School (MGHS) and Melbourne Boys’ High School (MBHS). In 1934, following years of uncertainty about their future, the girls finally found a permanent home on the present site. A new school came at a price, however, and it was controversially renamed The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School to honour its benefactor, Sir Macpherson Robertson, in recognition of his timely £100,000 gift to the state, £40,000 of which went to build Mac.Rob, as Sir Macpherson stipulated.

Mac.Rob is a prominent school often publicly and privately thought about, and discussed, in the same light as the most prestigious private and corporate schools for girls in Victoria. The prestige it enjoys accrues particularly from the academic success of its students. Mac.Rob is currently Victoria’s most successful secondary school (state or independent) at the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) examinations, a position it has held for the past three years. The conviction that this school offers greater advantage than comprehensive and co-educational high schools, as well as many of the private and corporate schools, is strong.¹

¹ Entry to Mac.Rob is by competitive examination. A quota system applies, although a limited number of places are offered annually at each other year level, with music places being offered in Years 10 and 11 (although students seeking entry at all levels must sit the entrance examination). This school has a diverse cultural mix and, as a statewide provider of girls’ secondary education, draws its students from metropolitan and country Victoria, with some international students; in all, more than seventy languages are spoken in the homes of Mac.Rob students. In 2006, over 1000 girls will vie for entry to Mac.Rob across the four year levels, but less than 300 will be successful.
Chapter One

Histories of Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School

No school is an island kingdom, ruled by proud and distant monarchs whose every word is wise and every act benevolent. The subjects of these kingdoms, the children, are often absent from these stories or are present merely as a background against which monarchs and their retinue can parade—though sometimes, years after they have left their schools, they are accepted back into the story as famous old boys or old girls, proofs that these island kingdoms have been well run.

R.J.W. Selleck, 1978

Writing histories of Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School has presented those who have tackled them with a variety of challenges. Three changes of name over a century, for example, add to the complexities of writing about Mac.Rob because students tend to identify with each incarnation of the school differently. A comprehensive history of Mac.Rob is, for some, a triptych of the Melbourne Continuation School (MCS) established in 1905, which covers Melbourne High School (MHS) in 1912, Melbourne Girls’ High School (1927–1934) and Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School in 1934. For others it is a history that really begins in 1927 when the school became single-sex, or in 1934 when the new premises at Albert Park were occupied and the current school name was first used. Not all former students regard the establishment of the MCS in 1905 as their historical reference point, although the school’s centenary celebrations during 2005 emphasised and promoted that point. Some say that they never really gave their former school’s name a thought until the school history project began—they either did not know that the school could trace its origins back to that point or had little interest in knowing about the school’s historical roots. For others, Mac.Rob’s history begins with the establishment of the MCS in 1905 and, regardless of its name, they see the current school evolving and progressing from that point.

Much of the chronology of Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School is expounded in various theses, papers and texts (written by former students and teaching staff) that sought to chart the evolution of state secondary education in Victoria, or aspects of it. Mac.Rob’s early years have also been included in the various histories of Melbourne High School up until

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the time of its division into separate single-sex schools in 1927. These histories are not, however, comprehensive histories of Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School, for the inclusion of the girls is peripheral to others’ stories.

There are also unpublished PhD and Master of Education theses and History of Education university undergraduate unit papers (almost all from the University of Melbourne) that examine a range of themes in the development of state secondary schooling in Victoria. It is within these that various histories of Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School have been positioned. In 1981, Kathleen Kalin (then a teacher at Mac.Rob) charted the school’s evolution within a male-dominated society as an ostensibly unique state secondary school for girls. In 1993, Judith Biddington drew on Mac.Rob to shed light on the experience of women in the Victorian Education Department in her 1995 doctoral thesis, ‘Something to fall back on: Women, Work and Education: Seven Victorian High Schools 1905–1945’. In 1994, former student Susan Sherson (Terry) produced a brief but lively general history for the school’s diamond anniversary as Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School. The following year Sandra Kantanis analysed the ‘three per cent rule’ introduced by the state government in 1970 to prevent Mac.Rob and Melbourne High School from skimming the most talented students from other high schools. In 1998 Barbara Green contrasted girls and boys’ educational opportunities and outcomes in tracing the school’s development between 1912 and 1934 for her thesis, ‘The Girls of Melbourne High School 1912–1934’, an important companion to any history of Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School. Most recently, in 2002, Josephine Gray (then principal of a Melbourne Catholic girls’ secondary school) examined the professional teaching career of former Mac.Rob principal, Mary Hutton (1934–1948) and shed further light on the experience of women with leadership ambitions working in Victorian state high schools.

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Some former students have included their schooling experiences in personal memoirs and autobiographies that have been published since the 1970s, thus providing rich contextual sources for understanding what it was like to be a girl in a particular period in Australian history. These include Amirah Inglis’s *Amirah: An un-Australian Childhood* (1983), Ennis Honey’s *Nymphs and Goddesses* (1994), Shirley Paine’s *Tiger Lilies* (1997) and Shirley Painter’s *The Bean Patch* (2002).\(^8\) One of fifteen contributors to *The Half-Open Door* (1982), Beatrice Faust wrote candidly about her years at Mac.Rob and her life beyond school.\(^9\) The most recent examination of a life of a former Mac.Rob student is Cheryl Griffin’s biography of Doris McRae, a student in 1908.\(^{10}\) McRae carved out a successful career in secondary education, but her membership of the Communist Party led to the abrupt cessation of that career. Her story provides a rich context from which to view teachers and politics in post–World War II Victoria. There are also a number of unpublished memoirs and biographical texts written by former students and their relatives. With a wide range of primary and secondary documents, Mac.Rob possesses a rich archive of material from which to craft any number of representations of its past.

**The background to the project**

In 2001, two historians from RMIT University, with Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School as their industry partner, were awarded an Australian Research Council (ARC) linkage grant to fund a postgraduate scholar to write the school’s history in time to celebrate the school’s centenary in 2005. The successful scholar was expected to produce both a publishable school history and a thesis that could make a useful contribution to the history of education and the discipline of history more broadly.

As a commissioned school history, the project brought with it a range of complexities, not the least of which was the poor reputation of many school histories in the past. Typically, the term ‘commissioned history’ has prompted negative responses from within scholarly circles, and, as academic historians began to enter the field in the 1970s, such histories were increasingly regarded as intellectually and methodologically constrained. Part of the

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reason for this was that few writers of school histories (commissioned or not) were trained historians. More often than not they were amateur historians, in numerous cases ‘old girls’ or ‘old boys’, whose subjectivities were invariably shaped (as is typically the case) by their schooling experiences. Another problem was that these writers were frequently neither intellectually nor financially autonomous—they could find themselves subject to the direction and constraints of school editorial committees, thus affecting the school history’s conceptualisation and content.\footnote{Marjorie Theobald, 1977, ‘Problems in Writing School Histories’, \textit{ANZHES Journal}, Vol.6, No.1, p.22.} The commissioned school history is also by necessity often an economic enterprise, with the recovery of publishing costs contingent upon its commercial success, although some schools (mainly private) are fortunate to have former students underwrite the costs. Most histories therefore have to appeal to potential purchasers in order to sell enough copies to cover expenses, further leaving the histories open to direction that would be less likely to occur with a history that has not been commissioned.\footnote{That said, the possibility that school histories might not be written unless they are commissioned means that fewer will be written unless schools are fortunate enough to find other avenues for writing their histories—particularly state schools with their limited funding.}

**The purpose of a school history**

The fact that so many school histories are products of centenary celebrations associates them with the notion of history as memorialisation. Typically, the school commissioning the history aspires to a celebratory history that can demonstrate and reinforce identity and traditions, rather than to a critical, analytical history that might stimulate controversy or provoke dissent and discord. The celebratory history, which often becomes the principal material feature of a commemoration, can be crucial in securing a school’s past as it negotiates its future directions and development. The purpose of a school history is thus important to the way such histories are thought about and written.

This history of Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School, although technically commissioned and funded, has not been subject to the constraints mentioned above, as it turns out. Initially, in organising the research project, I anticipated a careful process of negotiation between the different participants (RMIT University, Mac.Rob and myself), their interests, the audience involved and possible conflicting expectations. How would I go about making everybody happy? Was it even possible or desirable? The school’s representatives, however, made it clear that they would embrace my version of the school history because they had faith in
the selection process and they desired an innovative history of which Mac.Rob would be proud. With this as the school’s only direction throughout the research project, I found myself, a student of history with a keen interest in the philosophy of history, in particular the on-going controversies and debates that make the practice of history such a dynamic process, with the opportunity to write an account of the school history that was mindful of the problems, challenges and adventure in trying to reach genuine insights about the past.

The politics of educational history: conceptualising, researching and writing a history of Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School

Every grammar school seeks to be historical, to be an object of continuous cultivation to itself through its deeds of foundation and growth, its chronicles, its hagiography.

Richard Teese, 1984 13

Those who enter the schools of the past with their own set of perceptions should tread warily, since the individual outcomes of such an education varied greatly.

M. Theobald & A. Prentice, Women Who Taught, 199114

A woman does not have to have one explanation or history. Neither does Mac.Rob.

Pavla Miller to P. Parker, 2002

In writing a history of Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School as a scholarly thesis it was important to take into account how school histories (rather than the genre of writing itself) had fared historiographically in order to position the Mac.Rob history. Commissioned histories had fared poorly in the academic world, but what of school histories overall? Where did they fit into the study of the past and what contribution could they make to historical and social research? In other words, what is the point of a school history, this school history?

Since the 1970s, historians of education have been encouraged to write school histories that would contribute to mainstream Australian history and its fields as well as the various other fields of social research. Marjorie Theobald, historian of Australian education and

women’s history, was one of the first to take school history writing to task in the 1970s, and she did so vigorously. Then setting out on a university career after years as a secondary school teacher and education researcher, Theobald provocatively labelled the genre to that time a ‘blight upon the landscape of historical research’. She accused school histories, as they had been written, of being largely celebrations of survival, narcissistic in approach, nostalgic, lacking any theoretical frameworks and generally failing to ask questions. After her own experience of writing a history of Ruyton Girls’ School in 1978 for her Master of Education thesis, Theobald, a former Ruyton pupil, identified what were to her the most serious problems with school histories at the time. She argued that the ‘most disturbing anomalies in most school histories emanate from their failure to break out the hot house atmosphere of adulation and self-congratulation’. Theobald’s criticisms mark a watershed within the field of education history, and from that point there has been increasing pressure on historians, and education historians in particular, to adopt more analytical and critical approaches to the writing of school histories.

The last three decades of the twentieth century became busy years for education historians with an increase in the number of private school centennial celebrations. These, in turn, saw an increase in the number of centennial histories being published. It seems that history of education had not transformed itself sufficiently since Theobald took the profession to task, however. In 1990, Craig Campbell, former South Australian secondary school teacher and now historian of education at the University of Sydney, criticised the lack of state school histories, a criticism closely related to his research on residualisation.

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19 According to Campbell and Sherington, residualisation is ‘a process by which unrepresentative, and high proportions of children from working class, poor and recently arrived migrants collect in
and the state comprehensive school—an issue that involved Mac.Rob because of the belief that selective schools impoverish non-selective environments. ‘Few (state school histories) of any analytical worth’, Campbell declared, ‘exist in Australia in comparison to the notorious wealth of private and corporate school histories’. Instead of conceiving of themselves as celebratory and nostalgic enterprises, state school histories, if Campbell is correct, have an important role to play in future education policy and planning—something to be kept in mind in researching and planning the Mac.Rob history.

Theobald and Campbell’s challenges to education historians to break out of the self-congratulatory mode of writing highlighted the problem that trained historians were often not writing school histories. Their argument, that such a model more often than not consigned school histories to historical and social irrelevance offered a useful starting point for this history of Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School. But break out to where? Calls for new ways of writing about Australia’s educational past were, in fact, reflections of wider transformations that had witnessed the emergence of new fields of historical inquiry, including social history and women’s history from the late 1960s. The decades following the 1960s were a critical period for historians in Australia, and overseas, for they witnessed the emergence of historians and sociologists intent on revising the way Australia’s educational past had been conceptualised and represented. This school of thought (sometimes referred to as revisionist) had its origins in late 1960s North America, spreading quickly to the United Kingdom and to Australia in the 1970s. It did not just challenge the profession-focused Whig tradition of writing about heroic figures (usually male), such as pioneers in education and their inspiring achievements in a budding young democratic nation—a tradition that was, problematically as it later eventuated, removed from the mainstream interpretation of history. The revisionist tradition reconceptualised

the comprehensive high schools. Residualisation is the obverse of the same process described as middle class departure or “flight” from public, comprehensive schools’. C. Campbell and G. Sherington, “Residualisation” and regionalism in the recent history of the Australian comprehensive high school’, Paper presented at the Conference of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, 22 April 2003. Copy provided by Craig Campbell to Pauline Parker on 4 April 2003. Campbell and Sherington’s work had two conflicting implications for this history of Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School. First, as a selective state high school, Mac.Rob has been thought of as contributing to the process of residualisation, thus positioning it within debates about educational elites and undemocratic schooling. (See Richard Teese, 2000, Academic Success and Social Power, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, and Richard Teese and John Polesel, 2003, Undemocratic Schooling: Equality and Quality in Mass Secondary Education in Australia, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne). Second, a published history of Mac.Rob, a state high school, is important in adding balance to the proliferation of private school histories.

interpretative frameworks and linked educational history to the new social history. Theoretically and practically, no longer could education history be separated from the mainstream discipline of history and from the influence of other social science disciplines, including sociology, anthropology and psychology.

As the research project description for the Mac.Rob history, originally submitted to the ARC in 2001, specifically located this history within on-going historiographical debates between various schools of thought and traditions in historical research and writing, it was important to understand these debates in order to determine where a new school history might position itself.21 One of those schools of thought included the pioneering radical social historian and social critic, Michael Katz, whose work in the history of education, social welfare, poverty and urban social structure and family organisation in America became highly influential in Australia.22 Katz’s approach, with its methodological preference for statistical analysis, was subsequently taken up by Pavla Miller,23 Ian Davey,24 Malcolm Vick and Craig Campbell25 (who as South Australian-based scholars were referred to as the Adelaide School in the 1970s and 1980s), and Bob Bessant,26 Janet

21 As a newcomer to the field of history of education I also had to position myself—intellectually and professionally with many years of teaching experience in primary, secondary and tertiary environments.
McCalman, Richard Teese and, in the 1990s, Simon Marginson, all of whom powerfully and successfully combined quantitative and qualitative research methods. These innovative historians and social researchers advocated new historical approaches and interpretative frameworks in education research and shifted their interests to gender, age relations, patriarchy, family and youth, and markets and education. In 2002 Craig Campbell and Geoffrey Sherington described the important revolution that occurred with the rise of the Adelaide School, observing that: ‘Few elements of the discipline (history of education) were left untouched as research methods, research questions and interpretative frameworks were dramatically overhauled.’ Also influential within this school of thought were the Marxist-informed social theorists Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis who, in arguing that schools reproduced social and class inequalities, brought about a new and influential historical and methodological approach to the history of education and social history more broadly.

Another school of thought, which included Marjorie Theobald, Alison Mackinnon and Fay Gale in Australia, Kathleen Weiler in the U.S. and Alison Prentice (a former

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34 See F. Gale (ed), 2000, Making Space: Women and Education at St. Aloysius College 1880–2000, Wakefield Press, Adelaide. This is a thematic history.

student of Michael Katz) in Canada, prioritised qualitative approaches in the history of education. While positioning their education research within the developing fields of women’s and gender history, they contributed to debates surrounding the reconciling of narrative and theoretical approaches. Their work on girls and women, which emphasised female teachers as workers, drew significantly on narrative sources and oral histories, something that the Mac.Rob history project would also do. Theobald and Mackinnon in particular challenged more traditional representations of Australia’s educational history by examining the ways in which women and girls experienced education in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, an approach that well suited the Mac.Rob history. Caught up in the intense theoretical and methodological debates of the 1980s and 1990s, Theobald argued that ‘the stuff of women’s history remains the rich ethnographic detail of women’s lives which must be retrieved with infinite patience from widely scattered sources’, something that MacKinnon’s Love and Freedom did so powerfully. Love and Freedom traced the history of the ways in which women challenged changes in education, employment and women’s roles as wives and mothers. It provided a powerful model for asking whether the modern girl can ‘have it all’, as Mac.Rob women tend to say they were often told. In Love and Freedom, Mackinnon explored the realm of psychological autonomy in women, from

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38 Theobald, Knowing Women, p.4.

39 Mackinnon, Love and Freedom. This book precipitated a re-examination of my life as an educationist and woman as I was confronted with the varieties of experience and formation of subjectivities in other women in collecting oral histories for this history. A similar experience is recorded by Marjorie Theobald, describing how her research into women teaching in Australia precipitated a personal and professional crisis. According to Theobald, ‘The ubiquitous presence of memory and oral history in any history of women’s education in the 20th century is deeply implicated in this personal crisis’. See M. Theobald, 1999, ‘Teacher, Memory and Oral History’, in Kathleen Weiler and Sue Middleton (eds), Telling Women’s Lives: Narrative Inquiries into the History of Women’s Education, Open University Press, Buckingham.

40 See Natasha Campo, 2005, “‘Having it all’ or “had enough”? Blaming Feminism in the Age and the Sydney Morning Herald 1980–2004’, Journal of Australian Studies, January, pp. 63–74. This is an important examination of the relationship between the process of feminism and its purported promises and the actual experiences of women as they were represented and discussed in newspapers since 1980. Former Mac.Rob girls wonder about the relationship between their education and what became of them after leaving school compared with overt and subtle messages they remember receiving about what girls could or should do with their lives.
the early twentieth century; women who struggled with quiet desires for personal autonomy and relentless pressure to conform to conventional female roles as wives and mothers—nature or culture.\textsuperscript{41} Since quite a few former Mac.Rob students consider themselves to be failures in relation to idealised images (often mythologised) of the ‘successful’ Mac.Rob girl, \textit{Love and Freedom} generated new questions for the Mac.Rob history: how empowering has the Mac.Rob educational experience been for its students throughout a century, and what were girls seeking from an education, for example. One of the most significant transformations in the field of education history in the 1980s came from influential sociologist and historian R.W. Connell with his research on class and gender systems at work, and the social roles and educational processes of schools.\textsuperscript{42} In the path-breaking and reformist (in that it offered an alternative to reproduction theory), \textit{Making the Difference: Schools, Families and Social Divisions}, Connell, with co-authors, Dean Ashendon, Sandra Kessler and Gary Dowsett, lamented that a good social history of education in Australia was yet to be done—implying that such a history was important as its absence meant that gaps that existed muddied up the picture. \textit{Making the Difference} became important for the Mac.Rob history because of the questions it asked about who and what education is for, and its examination of the relationships between parents, students and educationists and their experiences, beliefs and perspectives about the purposes of education. The observation that girls’ schools are expected to ‘produce both marriageable femininity and high-powered academic competitors’,\textsuperscript{43} could well have been referring to Mac.Rob, the subject of this history, and it motivated me to want to know what that meant in the context of the historical experience of women who had been educated at Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School.

As education historians were being challenged to reinterpret and transform approaches to writing about Australia’s educational past, historians including R.J.W. Selleck, Bob Bessant,\textsuperscript{44} Marjorie Theobald,\textsuperscript{45} Alison Mackinnon,\textsuperscript{46} Craig Campbell and Carole Hooper\textsuperscript{47}

undertook critical analyses of the development of state education. Selleck’s focus on biographical writing contextualised that development socially, politically and culturally. His biography of Frank Tate, for example, Victoria’s first Director of Education, reveals the machinations of a nascent state bureaucracy amidst discourses on citizenship, childhood, class, womanhood, the struggle between secularism and religion, adolescence, work, gender and education. In Tate’s biography, Selleck argued that it was necessary to discuss at length significant administrative and political battles that occurred within the seemingly ‘undramatic façade of public service life’. His point, perhaps the most important methodological one for the Mac.Rob history, was that a rich cultural and political context is essential in giving body to the ‘shadowy values and hopes of a past generation’. These historians, among others, believed that historical research had the potential to provide important insights into educational practices as well as processes, including how institutional policies and practices emerge from, and continue to be shaped by, the political, social, economic and administrative pressures of the day.

Post-structuralist challenges to education histories

It is not just that women are absent from traditional histories; they are frequently absent from the historical documents traditionally used by historians.

Lesley Johnson, ‘The schooling of girls in the 1950s’, 1990

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49 Selleck, Frank Tate, p. xi.

50 C. Campbell and G. Sherington, The Comprehensive Public High School, p. 57. This was a good reason to position those who have headed Mac.Rob since 1905 so prominently in this history. In trying to understand what it has been like to be a girl at this school throughout a century, the heads’ stories are vital in establishing much of the rich context in which that experience occurred.

51 Lesley Johnson, ‘The Schooling of Girls in the 1950s: Problems with Writing a History of “Women’s Education”’, History of Education Review, Vol. 19, No. 2, 1990, p. 9. Johnson was searching for a framework in which to help her to explore, ‘rather than attempt to explain away the silence of many official education documents in the 1950s about girls’ education’. Recognising the complexities of educational institutions, Johnson argued that education histories to that point, particularly those concerning single-sex and coeducational schooling, do not examine how ‘girls are produced’. This has important ramifications for this history of Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School.
The central paradox of how women have both dealt with being educated in settings which seek to slot them into predetermined female roles and yet at the same time managed somehow to use this education to free their own intellects and pursue their own paths has engaged those attempting to write histories of women in education for some time.

Christine Trimingham Jack, 1997

Another group of social researchers in Australia in the 1990s were influenced by Foucauldian theories of citizen formation and the production of new subjectivities and new discursive regimes of truth as they took education history in new directions. Lesley Johnson and Deborah Tyler, Denise Meredyth and Ester Faye focused on the social construction of girlhood, problematising the idea of citizenship and the role of state policies and practices (including education) in structuring and organising girls’ subjectivities—research that is relevant to any Mac.Rob history trying to reveal the ambiguities, harmonies and conflicts in being a girl at this school. Johnson’s own questioning of the meanings of ‘growing up’ and the meanings of being female in terms of the schooling practices in the 1950s in *The Modern Girl* provided a valuable model for this Mac.Rob history in exploring girls’ subjectivities as Mac.Rob girls, working-class girls, middle-class girls, French girls, Jewish girls, protestant girls, secular girls, radical girls and conservative girls, for example.

In 1997, Canberra-based historian of education, Christine Trimingham Jack, drew on Barbara Finkelstein’s often-referred to historiographical review of education histories to reinvigorate the challenge to current and future historians of education to aspire to histories that were more than Whig histories. Finkelstein had argued that educational structures were too because of the belief that girls at this school have the opportunity to make themselves rather than fit into the ascribed roles of wife and mother. See pp. 11–13.


Lesley Johnson, 1993, *The Modern Girl*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney. Research such as Johnson’s was invaluable in writing the Mac.Rob history. It provided a rich context for understanding and clarifying what I was being told in the interviews. Education researchers, Julie McLeod and Lyn Yates have recently published the results of an eight-year study of more than 350 interviews with young Australians from different backgrounds and how they shaped their lives through the experience of secondary schooling and beyond school. It will be an important investigation into identity-making and the subjectivities of young Australians with which former Mac.Rob students can contrast their own experiences and subjectivities. See Julie McLeod and Lyn Yates, 2006, *Making Modern Lives: Subjectivity, Schooling and Social Change*, State University of New York Press New York.

Barbara Finkelstein, 1992, ‘Education Historians as Mythmakers’, *Review of Research in
often emphasised over behaviour in education histories, thus prioritising the perspectives of policy makers and planners and the lives and achievements of elites. Such histories have had a tendency to see themselves as definitive and largely tended to ignore the contribution that oral history, for example, can make to the construction of subjectivities and the exploration of the multiple discourses of lived experience. According to Trimingham Jack, too many histories (including school histories) continue to privilege the empirical evidence of institutional documentary sources (which are written with an audience in mind) over data drawn from interviews. In light of this, and informed by the theorising of Marie-Françoise Chanfrault-Duchet, that women’s life stories deal not just with the relation between a woman and society, but with ‘the collectives representations of woman as they have been shaped by the society with which the woman being interviewed must deal’, Trimingham Jack suggested that historians need to ‘analyse education as something experienced as well as planned’.

In her exploration of the possibilities of post-structuralist theory to challenge traditional approaches to writing school histories, Trimingham Jack warned that school histories that tend to become exercises in self-presentation and reflect the aspirations of the school miss out on the important opportunity to reveal the diversity of experience within the school throughout its existence; experience that could well contest the sycophantic and celebratory preferred version. In 2003, Trimingham Jack’s history of her own secondary school was published. In Growing Good Catholic Girls: Education and Convent Life in Australia, she set out to unlock a multiplicity of meanings embedded in how school was experienced at Kerever Park in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales between 1944 and 1965 when the school closed. She relied on fifteen in-depth oral histories to do so.

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57 Trimingham Jack, “School History: Constructing the Lived Experience”, p. 44.
59 There were some women who did not approve of some representations and interpretations in Trimingham Jack’s school history. Some refused to attend the official book launch and voiced their disapproval in letters. Women also praised the history and its interpretations in the light of their own memories of their experience of schooling at Kerever Park and were delighted with the school history. Conversation between Christine Trimingham Jack and Pauline Parker at Canberra University, February 2005, author’s journal.
There have been numerous debates about the usefulness and validity as evidence of oral histories and interviews. One consistent argument has been that these research methods are too subjective, and that they create serious problems about memory, interpretation and meaning for the historian in writing about the past. Fontana and Frey have acknowledged that there is always a residue of ambiguity regarding meaning in the spoken word, and yet, interviewing is, in their opinion, one of the most powerful ways in which we can understand our fellow human beings. In terms of this history of Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School, oral histories and interviews gave me access to context that could not be found primarily in documentary sources. Interviews and oral histories, then, have been an important in this history because of their capacity to reveal the contradictions between reality, myth and ideology: between, as one example, the ways in which the principals managed the school as revealed in a cross-section of the subjectivities of the girls of Mac.Rob over a century. As Pamela MacLean and Michele Langfield showed in their recent oral history project (sensory memories of Jewish women who migrated to Australia as children), oral histories and interviews help the researcher to see how individuals make sense of their own past in a meaningful way and the mediating capacity of memory in the construction of meaning. And meaning, argues Alessandro Portelli, is important in understanding the past. Oral sources, then, are critical in sharing meaning. According to Portelli, ‘Oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did’. As I had no knowledge whatsoever of Mac.Rob prior to this history project, the oral histories were vital in providing a broad cross-section of perspectives, experiences and understandings of the meaning of Mac.Rob in the Victorian education landscape, and they gave form to the memories and interpretations of schooling experiences.

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62 Alessandro Portelli, 1991, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*, State University of New York Press, New York, p. 48. See also p. 69 where Portelli argues that meaning is what is important in memory, and the narrative effort to make sense of the past and give form to lives from the past.
63 My first information about the school was came from newspaper reports that theorised the school as elitist—a pseudo private school— with its emphasis on tradition and its confirmed reputation as the most successful Victorian secondary school (public or private) at the VCE examinations.
Theorising Mac.Rob

Trimingham Jack’s challenge to historians to work to understand meanings embedded in how school was experienced was influential in conceptualising this history of Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School, particularly its possible final form. In 2001, when the project was submitted to the ARC, the idea was to produce a school history that combined statistical analysis of routinely generated school records (to gain invisible knowledge of particular populations) with narrative history. When the research project began in February 2002, the questions that a statistical analysis might engage were, however, not my questions. They were questions that had been posed by other experienced researchers in light of their own research and where they saw gaps in education research. These included two continuing policy debates: the place of selective state schools in a national system of education and the significance and dynamics of single-sex schools and the education of girls more generally. Embedded in these debates were other debates—girls’ educational outcomes, the relationship of ‘markets’ to Mac.Rob’s policy-making and the culture and guiding principle of this school—its traditions, cultural practices and its position within the Victorian education landscape as a selective girls’ school. The possibilities and directions—theoretically and practically—for this school history were, for some time, overwhelming.

An interaction of theory and method

What is the purpose of a school history? Is it to tell the story of the school from the perspectives of students, teachers, parents or should it include broader experience and social issues? Is it to enter more controversial spaces and understand the school in the broader context of state education and policy making? Single-sex schooling that is competitive from the moment of gaining entry through examination to the finale of gaining entry to university through examination offers an alluring tale. Which should it be? Which can it be?

The spoken or written word has always been a residue of ambiguity...yet interviewing is one of the most powerful ways in which we can try to understand our fellow human beings.

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64 Although I refer to this thesis as the ‘final form’, there is nothing definitive nor final about this history of Mac.Rob. It is, as I have made clear to the school community, a beginning. There are many ways in which this history could have been theorised and written, and it is my hope that the history as I have written it will provoke others to further tackle Mac.Rob’s history, and their own histories, in different ways, for a more comprehensive representation and interpretation of the past.

65 Author’s journal, July 2004.

As outlined, the Mac.Rob history’s original research design combined statistical analysis and narrative sources and oral histories. In addition, a rich resource of documentary sources was available in the school archive, including extensive correspondence of principals and former students and numerous school publications. One hundred interviews were originally planned, to cover as much as possible of the hundred years, 1905-2005. Prospective interviewees were selected at random from a database of former students. Increasingly sensitive to the broad context within which the Mac.Rob history could be positioned, I began the process of collecting oral histories from former students to learn about Mac.Rob from their perspectives and memories—to detect what stood out in remembering their school years and experiences. What was it like at this school? Why were they there at all in 1905? Why did they go there and not to another school at different points throughout the hundred years? What did they, and their parents, expect from their education? What ambitions, dreams and desires might they have had as girls, as young women, as educated women? How did they cope with the education experience? What was expected of them? What were their principals and teachers like? What made good teachers? How did they cope with difference? What did they enjoy and not enjoy? What happened to them after leaving school? What have they done in life beyond school and what relationship might their life paths have with their educational experience?

As the oral history collection increased, unanticipated sources of information surfaced. Women’s networking, for example, connected me with former students whose experiences were important in understanding not just Mac.Rob’s structures and organisations, but girls’ and women’s experiences of education more broadly. I discovered that numerous former Mac.Rob students meet regularly in small groups—some have been doing so for over sixty years. These friendship groups became valuable focus groups as women became increasingly aware of the history project. In these groups I listened to memories of schooling as well as arguments and contradictions generated in the process of remembering as women sought to negotiate each other’s memories and interpretations to establish the truth, the ‘reality’ of what actually happened. Memories were richly contextualised and often vigorously contested, and I was able to introduce questions and statements from interviews to generate further interpretation, context and comparison of experiences and subjects. Maclean and Langfield’s observation that interviews have the

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67 With former students living throughout Melbourne, regional Victoria and every other Australian state, as well as overseas, I decided to restrict interviews to Melbourne and closer country areas initially. Some women later traveled to Melbourne for interviews, so eager were they to participate. From 2004, women living overseas shared their narratives via E-mail.
capacity to reveal contradictions between ideology, myth and reality was reinforced by my experience, but the Mac.Rob project enjoyed further valuable outcomes from the interview experience.68

As the interviews and focus groups continued, I wrote articles about my research—about the headmistresses and principals, for example—which were published in Vista, a magazine with a readership of over five thousand former Mac.Rob students and staff and their families. While I invited feedback, I did not expect what followed. Dozens of women (sometimes relatives of former students) sent me e-mails, letters, artefacts, pictures, photographs, newspaper articles, magazines, memoirs, biographical and autobiographical texts—a mass of information and memory about being at Mac.Rob throughout much of the twentieth century. All of this unanticipated but welcome material substantially transformed the original directions, focus and structure of this history. As I continued to interview former students, teachers and the occasional former education department bureaucrat (male) encountered at a conference, I appreciated that investigation of the experience (and memory of the experience) of being a girl at this school throughout a century could tackle some of the questions and issues posed in the original project description. Furthermore, my own questions could be addressed—questions that arose from the very first interview and focus group. Each new contact shed significant light on headship at Mac.Rob and they provided numerous stories and specific examples of experiences as former students (and some) teachers remembered their school days. Buoyed by this response, and many new questions, I later sent out an e-mail questionnaire, its questions drawn from the narratives I had heard and read in the interviews, emails, letters and the written memoirs, biographical and autobiographical texts I had received. These combined sources helped to crystallise new themes for the school history, suggesting that the data I was seeking was not immediately available in the routinely generated school records and examination books. The realisation that jumping into analyses of school records would be simplistic and superficial without a guiding principle to steer such an approach suggested that statistical analysis could come later—after the voices of the students had been heard and new questions emerged.

This history is not a sociological project. It is a historical one—a social history in so far as the school is an important part of the social world. Although the Mac.Rob history does not eschew theory, it is primarily concerned with, as Craig Reynolds put it in a discussion on

poststructuralism and its effect on the practice of history, ‘contemplating the meaning of the past rather than heaping up more data about the past’. Yet, how could I, who had never attended Mac.Rob, or any school like it, come to a good understanding of the meaning of the past from the perspectives of the women who were there at particular points in time throughout a century? How could I explain this school that had begun in specific circumstances in 1905 without romanticising it or making assumptions about women’s experiences and subjectivities? In the end, I decided to adopt a thematic approach and focus on the experience of being a girl at Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School from 1905. The narrative material I had received revealed its own themes, and mindful of education and historians’ recognition of the invisibility of students as subjects of history, I elected to focus on the girls at Mac.Rob. My aim, then, is to reveal what is has been like to be a girl at this school throughout a century—to place them historically in their contexts through their own narratives as far as possible: history by memory, contextualised by primary and secondary documentary sources. To do this, I juxtapose the former headmistresses and principals subjectivities and messages as school leaders with the girls’ subjectivities and experiences. As the heads typically dominated former students’ narratives it was important to position them carefully in the Mac.Rob history. In making this decision I was mindful that all subjectivities were invariably shaped by ideologies and beliefs—of the state, family and church, and the nascent state education bureaucracy from 1905 when the state decided to enter the field of secondary education. From several possible paths, the one chosen for this history was guided by a broad yet powerful question that became a continuous thread throughout the entire research project: who and what is education for?

**A history of Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School:**

The following chapter traces the establishment and progress of the Melbourne Continuation School (MCS) within the broader education landscape at the beginning of the twentieth century. Widespread protest accompanied the establishment of the Continuation School, therefore it is important to examine that dissent to understand what girls were facing as their opportunities for education to stay at school beyond the primary and elementary years slowly improved. This chapter also introduces and considers the Continuation School’s (renamed Melbourne High School in 1912) first principal, Joseph Hocking, along with the first headmistress, Margery Robertson and Hocking’s successor,

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Claude Searby—the man who precipitated the school’s division into autonomous single sex schools, Melbourne Boys’ High School and Melbourne Girls’ High School. The heads were zealous in their efforts to set the tone of the school and how they understood their roles and how they performed them provides rich context for how girls experienced, and remember experiencing, their secondary schooling.

Chapter three examines the struggles Mac.Rob has faced since 1927 when the boys moved out of Melbourne High School at Spring Street to their £100,000 new school at Forrest Hill. With their departure, the girls were left behind to put up with a building that was literally falling down around them, and many former students recall those years at Spring Street with great clarity. The school moved from Spring Street to Government House, then to King Street in West Melbourne, before finally finding a permanent home at Albert Park in 1934, thanks to the largesse of Sir Macpherson Robertson. War saw the girls on the move again in 1942 and it was not certain that the school would survive that separation until pressure from the teachers’ union and the principal, Mary Hutton, resulted in the girls’ return. Since then, Mac.Rob has faced other challenges, some of which are examined in this chapter, but one challenge, the arrival of the Formula One Grand Prix at Albert Park, provides a good example of how Mac.Rob deals with hardship and adversity. As survival as a girls’ secondary school has never be certain since 1927, this chapter serves as a coherent narrative of what could be argued was a series of accidents throughout the century.

Chapter four focuses on tradition-building from 1927 when Melbourne High School divided along gender lines. Christina Montgomery, the first headmistress of the girls’ school, was in a unique position as she set about continuing traditions from the old school (MCS and MHS), and creating new ones. Tradition is important at Mac.Rob, and it is often proffered as one of the main reasons parents choose the school for their daughters in the twenty-first century. It also ties the present to the past in ways that have been, and continue to be, important for former students and staff—in no small part due to the school’s status as Victoria’s first state high school along with its academic success and enduring moral reputation.

Chapters five and six are devoted to the women who have headed Mac.Rob since 1927 when it was known as Melbourne Girls’ High School. In focusing on the experiences of the girls of MGHS I spent a long time puzzling over the impact of the headmistresses and principals, thinking about and wondering what it meant to be in charge of a school in
different times, how women selected to head schools imagined themselves in their positions, and what sources of guidance they might have drawn upon. It was the heads who organised the school, invented and borrowed its traditions and shaped its intellectual and social cultures. Each had her own goals and priorities within the Victorian education landscape as it developed. There were paradoxes in former students’ memories and accounts of their headmistresses and principals, and so I went to other sources to contextualise them as Selleck had done in his biography of Frank Tate—to show how their stories are important in providing a rich context that could give shape to the values, hopes, ideas and experiences of past generations at Mac.Rob.

Having employed the first five chapters to set out the factors integral to the growth of Victoria’s only selective state high school for girls, chapter seven is devoted to an examination of what is has been like to be a girl at the Continuation School, MHS, MGHS and Mac.Rob since 1905. Each preceding chapter leads up to this chapter, all the while establishing context and meaning. Chapter seven is thematically structured according to what former students prioritised in remembering their school days at Mac.Rob. Girls came to this school for different reasons and they brought with them certain experiences, life strategies and subjectivities. Once at school they fitted in or they may have learned that their strategies were inadequate and thus they had to change them in order to suit (even survive) their new environment. Being there was easy for some, difficult for others. ‘Mac.Rob girl’ has never been a homogenous category of being, and in this chapter I also examine what it means to be a Mac.Rob girl and how some women who attended this school understand their relationship to it, and how, if at all, it shaped their identities as girls and women.

The final chapter, the conclusion, ties together the history’s main threads and themes: the meaning of Mac.Rob within the varieties of historical experience, girls’ identities and subjectivities, success and failure at Victoria’s only selective state high school for girls and Mac.Rob’s position, historically and in the present within the Victorian education landscape. Mac.Rob is a multiplicity of experiences, perspectives, interpretation and subjectivities. There is no single definitive explanation or neat homogenous narrative, and yet the Mac.Rob community can say, ‘This is who we are and this is what we stand for’.
A final note

Readers will notice the absence of a chapter specifically devoted to the teachers in this history of Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School, though many comments and impressions they recorded are included throughout. Nevertheless, a brief explanation of my decision to omit a detailed discussion of their contribution is important. Former students speak about their favourite teachers as well as teachers who are remembered without affection, sometimes even with fear. There were some women who broke down and cried when talking about a teacher with whom they had a difficult relationship. Equally, there are students who loved specific teachers and remember them with great joy and gratitude. While it would have been productive to include teachers on the basis of how they were experienced by their students, interviews with teachers confirmed doubts about the value of such an approach. Teachers’ experiences of being at Mac.Rob are complex, and memories are often in contention with broader interpretations of experience. A further history is therefore planned that examines the professional and private world of the Mac.Rob teacher; that does justice to their stories and memories of experiences. That said, there are glimpses into their world through the memories of their students and the analysis of the directions taken by each principal.
Chapter Two

From the Melbourne Continuation School/Melbourne High School to Melbourne Girls’ High School

[Frank] Tate believed that the state should provide a broad stairway between the educational storeys ‘for all children capable of climbing it’, rather than merely ‘throwing out a few ropes from the upper storey to accommodate a few selected scholars.

Arthur Sachse, Minister of Public Instruction, Victoria, 1904

You teach everything at six pounds per annum. These are sweating rates. This is scandalous. I suppose the next thing the State will do is open a boarding school.

Rev. Dr W. H. Fitchett, (MLC), 1904

Will you still give us ten pounds for the pupils who come to us?

Rev. S. G. McLaren (PLC), 1904

The continuation schools for the training of junior teachers in Victoria are being watched by the Incorporated Association of Secondary Teachers of Victoria for fear that a boy or girl should manage to get a cheap secondary education under the cloak of becoming a teacher.

Director of Education, Frank Tate, 1907

Education in the future must be a business consolidated on a large scale. Unless the Church does it, it will fall into the hands of the State, and the State can only give instruction. It can never educate, because education is a religious work and the State has no religion.

Messenger, Tintern CEGGS, 1908

1 Report of the Minister of Public Instruction 1903–04, pp. 35–6.
2 Argus, 15 June 1905, p. 5.
3 Argus, 7 January 1905 and Age, 14 March 1931, p.18.
4 See also Frank Tate, ‘School Power: An Imperial Necessity’, Education Gazette and Teachers’ Aid, 20 November 1909, p. 103.
Inventing the Melbourne Continuation School

On 11 October 1904 the Victorian Premier, the Hon. Thomas Bent, announced that a Continuation School for prospective teachers was to be established in Melbourne. Bent was an opportunistic man, a man described by eminent Australian historian R.J.W. Selleck in *The Shop* as a ‘resilient but venal political manipulator discredited by financial and political scandals’; a man who cleverly pre-empted the official announcement of the Melbourne Continuation School’s establishment when he let the information ‘slip’ at a public gathering in Warrnambool. Bent’s announcement provoked a public furore, the denominational, corporate and private schools of the day reacting angrily as their headmasters levelled bitter accusations against the state and the Victorian Education Department as well as the Director of Education, Frank Tate, the driving force behind the Continuation School. The Melbourne Continuation School (MCS) was thus caught up in controversy even before it opened. Given the rage against the state’s entry into the field of post-elementary education, it is useful to examine briefly what the problem was for the non-state secondary schools and what this meant for the Continuation School as well as post-elementary and secondary education for girls in Victoria.

The most prominent public protagonists in the controversy were the Reverend Dr W. H. Fitchett, headmaster at Methodist Ladies College (MLC), S. G. McLaren, headmaster at Presbyterian Ladies College (PLC) and Lawrence Adamson, headmaster at Wesley College. The Continuation School, in Dr Fitchett’s view, represented unwanted competition and a threat to the hegemony of the traditional, and rightful, custodians of secondary education, the independent schools. He protested loudly that the intrusion of the state into an area that had traditionally been the province of the private sector was ‘simply socialism’, and he warned that if the state entered the field of ‘secondary’ education it could just as easily enter every other aspect of people’s lives—the public’s individual freedoms were at stake, he cautioned.

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7 Furthermore, according to Selleck, some private schools were so concerned that they gave their support to the *Teachers’ and Schools’ Registration Act of 1905* in the wake of the state’s decision to establish the Continuation School in order to reduce competition from the private sector for their schools. Selleck, *The Shop*, p. 459.
Perhaps, even more importantly, the state’s new venture threatened the class composition of the clientele of the independent schools. Fitchett himself introduced the issue of class into the public debate that continued throughout November and December in the Argus newspaper. He argued that the state’s entry into secondary education was a far too tangible manifestation of the radical social theory that affordable schooling should and could be available to the masses. Until that time, the independent schools had carved out a highly segregated post-elementary (secondary) education market niche by excluding those who could not afford their fees. The deserving and intelligent poor, however, could be given a lift up the social and economic ladder through the allocation of a number of scholarships. The state government indicated that scholarships would also be available to girls and boys who had the brains but not the money to pursue a post-elementary education at the Continuation School (in effect breaking open the education market), but Fitchett countered that scholarship winners who enrolled at the Continuation School would be disadvantaged by not being able to ‘mix with the class to which they were entitled to belong’.

Fitchett was not alone in his concern about class issues as the Victorian Parliamentary Debates (VPD) of 1905 reveal, for David Gaunson, Public Officer (1904–07), former MLA, prominent criminal barrister and legal advisor to the notorious John Wren, loudly complained in the parliament (and in the media of the day) that the state was ‘building up a lamentable state of things under the idiotic craze for training schools, Continuation Schools, and secondary schools’. Gaunson would prove to be a thorn in Frank Tate’s side with his malevolent opposition to Tate’s plans, and he declared provocatively:

\[\text{Lord! I suppose we shall have tertiary schools next, with a frightful amount of mental muck, because it is nothing but that. Instead of the lads and lasses}\]

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10 See Argus, 10 February 1905 for the substance of private school protests.
11 A question of terminology needs to be clarified at this point. According to education and social historian Craig Campbell, ‘At the time of the early state high school foundations, there was no clear system or agreement concerning secondary school naming. Indeed the word “secondary” only has meaning in relation to a clear and hierarchical articulation of schooling which was being invented in Australia at the same time as modern state high schools were being founded…In 1900 secondary schooling could be described as “higher” or “high”, “continuation”, “superior”, “middle class”, “grammar”, “advanced” and so on. Soon other formulations such as “intermediate”, “central” and “super primary” would join the jostling descriptors’. C. Campbell, ‘The State High School in History’, Change: Transformations in Education, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2001, p. 3. In this thesis I use the terms “post-elementary” to refer to schooling beyond elementary grades in state schools (until 1912 when high school became the term formally used), and “secondary” as it was used in 1905 and thereafter as found in primary documents. The private and corporate schools in Victoria referred to secondary education and so did the men involved in establishing the MCS as reported in the newspapers, government gazettes and correspondence.
12 Argus, 10 February 1905.
being educated up to their true position, they are being educated far and away beyond what there is any necessity for, and they are being educated into a system of desiring the ordinary avocations of life.\textsuperscript{13}

S. G. McLaren supported the class-based arguments, arguing that a school like PLC had an important role to play in secondary education, as it changed the ‘rough and uncouth’ girls who came from state schools to polished and refined girls, able to ‘mix with girls of better classes’.\textsuperscript{14} Why did the state need to interfere with a system that was working effectively in the eyes of the independent schools, he asked.\textsuperscript{15} Wesley similarly drew in many talented working-class boys through the scholarship system and Lawrence Adamson could not afford to lose this important clientele to, nor be in competition with, the state’s version of secondary schooling.

Perhaps, too, these headmasters felt that any alteration of the prevailing education landscape might affect public confidence in their schools. Already facing competition from the emergence of academically successful private schools such as John B. O’Hara’s South Melbourne College, schools like MLC, PLC and Wesley were hit hard by the depression of the 1890s and soon after by the devastating state-wide drought of the early twentieth century. Fees had been lowered to reduce student withdrawals, particularly those of country students whose boarding fees made up a substantial portion of the schools’ incomes. Fees at the Continuation School were to be set at six pounds per annum, far less than the minimum ten guineas charged by existing secondary schools (six pounds, however, could represent at least two or three weeks wages for some students’ fathers). Would parents take their daughters out of MLC and similar schools to educate them more inexpensively? Would the state’s cheaper fees alter the way families thought about education in general? Would the idea of state post-elementary schooling appeal to parents as a realistic alternative, rather than just a cheaper option, to secondary schooling available in 1905?

There was another issue on Fitchett’s mind that must have increased his exasperation and fury with the state. This was the fact that it had taken almost ten years of intensive planning and labour to bring to life the idea of a secondary school for the ‘daughters of Methodism’, only to have it all jeopardised by the state. In 1872, the year in which the Victorian Education Department was established, the Victorian Methodist Conference had resolved that it was ‘time to make provision for the superior education of the daughters of our

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{13} David Gaunson, \textit{Victorian Parliamentary Debates (VPD)}, 15 February 1905, Vol. 110, p. 2589.
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Selleck, \textit{Frank Tate}, pp. 153–4.
  \item \textsuperscript{15} Selleck, \textit{Frank Tate}, pp. 153–4.
\end{itemize}
Methodism’s mission as an educational provider was almost as strong as its commitment to moral temperance and social welfare, and perhaps Dr Fitchett, a man well known and respected for his allegiance to the British Empire, expected loyalty from the state into which Methodism had put a good deal of its cultural and social capital. Lawrence Adamson was able to gain concessions from Frank Tate to preserve the position of schools like Wesley, extracting an agreement that ensured state high schools would not open close to existing secondary schools. This agreement lasted for decades, and even in the 1940s and 1950s there were state high schools in Melbourne’s south-eastern and eastern suburbs that did not offer a leaving or matriculation year as a concession to non-state secondary education providers. This had ramifications for Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School since it was obliged to take in from those schools girls who wanted to complete the final year of secondary schooling to qualify for university entrance.

The controversy provoked by Premier Bent’s announcement revealed two opposing views concerning the purpose of education, in particular post-elementary (secondary) education, and these views are important in demonstrating the context in which the Continuation School, and all that it represented, was established. To the wealthier independent schools education was the primary agency for social status formation, and for the inculcation of religious values, ethics, and the moral and social standards of the middle class. These qualities were regarded as neither the province nor the responsibility of a young state government. The state, on the other hand, promoted education as the primary vehicle for national improvement, particularly of the working class, in a growing democracy. When Frank Tate answered accusations that state education was ‘godless’ with a Continuation School curriculum that focused on the intellectual, moral and cultural development of the individual, it seemed that state intervention threatened the hegemony of the independent schools in just about every way. Just when the denominational schools were consolidating themselves and achieving good results at the university examinations, the unsettling entry of the state into the provision of post-elementary schooling made them feel vulnerable. Seeing themselves as the rightful gatekeepers of educational access, the independent schools were not going to relinquish their control without a fight.

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18 Girls who were forced to leave their high school and transfer to Mac.Rob for the final year of secondary schooling recall that the move presented difficulties—it was hard to settle in and make friends and become enculturated into the school’s traditions and ethos. Interview with Lois Bryson (Hobson), 23 August 2002.
19 See, for example, *Argus*, 10 February 1905.
The very public stoush over secondary education might well have advantaged girls’ educational prospects at the time as it probably sparked a new interest in education, an interest that also benefited the state and the Continuation School where, in its first year, demand surpassed the number of places available.\(^{20}\) Realisation that an alternative to the private and corporate schools now existed may well have encouraged some parents to consider the advantage of further education where they had not thought of it before. Whether or not they could afford to send a child to the Continuation School or the state high schools as they sprang up, the fact that such an education was a possibility might well have made parents think about education and their children’s futures differently.

With this struggle going on in the background, the Continuation School opened its doors to 135 girls and 68 boys on 15 February 1905. The majority of them were there to prepare to enter the teaching profession, to receive two years of advanced education and qualify for the Junior Public certificate, after which they would go out into state schools as junior teachers. Only a handful of students would continue on to university.

**Opening Ceremony**

The official opening of the MCS on 14 June 1905 was an important political and social event, and everyone who was ‘anyone’ was there, regardless of personal opinions about the Continuation School and what it represented. The Governor of Victoria and his wife, Sir Reginald and Lady Talbot, led one hundred distinguished guests, who included ‘members of the State Ministry and Parliament, University professors and councillors, the heads of public schools, representatives of the medical and learned professions and chief officers of the State departments’.\(^{21}\) Parents were also able to attend, encouraged by principal Joseph Hocking’s invitation to this special day. There was no great hall or elaborate room in which the guests, students and teachers could formally gather to mark this unique event. Instead, the opening ceremony was held in two of the classrooms that doubled as a hall, and, with space at a premium, only a few lucky students could fit into the gallery above to hear the speeches and witness the distinguished guests in their finery.

The speeches delivered at the opening ceremony deserve some attention here because they reveal some of the thoughts and priorities of key players in state education and society in 1905. Given the commotion that ensued when the establishment of the Continuation School

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\(^{21}\) *Argus* 15 June 1905, p. 9; see also *Education Gazette and Teachers’ Aid*, 20 July, 1905, p. 5 for a comprehensive report on the opening ceremony.
was announced, a brief examination of the speeches offers useful insights into how education was being thought about in high places, particularly girls’ education, the focus of this dissertation. Speech-making can be inspiring business as speakers become bound up in the special sense of occasion that has brought people together. Speech-making is also about performance—an occasion to express views and ideals publicly and to be affirmed by an encouraging audience response. At the official opening of the Continuation School, each speaker prioritised some aspect of education that he—and they were all men—considered important for the occasion. In sharing their respective visions about the future of the nation, each (not unexpectedly) positioned education as the most important issue in securing that future.

In his speech, the Minister of Public Instruction, the Hon. Arthur Otto Sachse, Member of the Legislative Council (MLC), spoke about the lives and working conditions of women teachers in the Victorian Education Department. He told the gathering that, traditionally, girls could become pupil teachers as young as fourteen years of age, the legal school leaving age at the time. This, Sachse explained, brought them into a system where they taught all day and studied or attended the teacher training school at night. Such a system saw already exhausted young women sent to country schools where their health suffered and often broke down.\textsuperscript{22} Sachse pointed out the potential of the Continuation School to vastly improve the lives of young women entering the teaching profession, for no longer would girls (or boys, although women dominated the teaching profession at the turn of the twentieth century) need to become apprentices and spend four years training in order to qualify for a teaching certificate. The fact that improved education and training for prospective teachers would also lift the standard of teaching and education in general would not have been lost on those present. It was a subtle but effective advertisement for the Continuation School itself.

The idealistic and ambitious Director of Education, Frank Tate, the tenacious force behind the establishment of the Continuation School, spoke about the utilitarian benefits of educational efficiency in an increasingly international environment where nations were competing with each other economically. ‘If Australia is to become great socially, politically and industriously, its greatness must be founded upon real, substantial and efficient education’,\textsuperscript{23} he told the gathering. Tate linked the establishment of the Continuation School to a new role for education in fitting young women and men to be the

\textsuperscript{22} Sachse also pointed out that the Department also had to foot a hefty bill because of teacher illness and that the new system would rectify this ‘evil’. \textit{Education Gazette and Teachers’ Aid}, 20 July 1905, pp. 6–7.

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Education Gazette and Teachers’ Aid}, 20 July 1905, pp. 8–9.
kind of citizens Australia needed to secure its future. Education was to be the foundation of the future prosperity, greatness and happiness of the state and, like his minister, Tate emphasised that good teachers were needed to provide a good education; but then he went further. In his broader vision the Continuation School could also provide a bridge for state school scholars to qualify for the university, should they aspire to go on.24

The Victorian Governor praised Tate’s address and expressed genuine regret that the old system stopped girls and boys from pursuing an education to the fullest degree, particularly if they lacked the financial means to go further. The Continuation School was a watershed from his perspective, giving the worthy poor access to a better life and a leg up the social ladder if they showed the necessary talent.25 Thomas Bent, in a display of egalitarian showmanship, and perhaps in electioneering mode, reiterated the rhetoric of fairer access to university for those who were bright enough to satisfy the entrance requirements. Comfortable and in his element as Premier, he drew polite laughs and applause from the guests as he addressed the most distinguished guests familiarly by name. Bent, whose own lack of education was always a tender point with him,26 made an impassioned and appealing speech about access and equity for all those with the talent to get into university, regardless of their capacity to pay. ‘I say’, he declared, ‘these boys and girls are to go to the university. The girls and boys who have the brains must go up to that grand institution, whether their parents have money or not’.27

The Continuation School’s founding principal, Joseph Hocking, addressed the gathering as a man inspired, not just by the historic occasion, but also by his own position as head of the school. The opening ceremony gave him the opportunity to voice his own ideas on matters that concerned him most and he used the occasion to welcome the parents, demystifying the mission of the school. ‘Visiting day’, he said, ‘will do much to remove any fallacies in regard to education’, and he proceeded to argue a case for equal opportunity in education for Victoria’s youth. ‘We must give every boy and every girl who comes under our care an opportunity of developing the very best that is in them’,28 he declared.

The metaphors Joseph Hocking used to speak about youth were well received in the applause of the gathering. Likening the school to a successful factory engaged in

24 Education Gazette and Teachers’ Aid, 20 July 1905, pp. 8–12.
25 Education Gazette and Teachers’ Aid, 20 July 1905, pp. 8–12.
27 Education Gazette and Teachers’ Aid, 20 July 1905, pp. 8–12.
28 Education Gazette and Teachers’ Aid, 20 July 1905, pp. 8–12.
manufacturing the best of products, Hocking linked the tone of his school and the character of his students with national efficiency and good citizenship. While these speeches set the scene for the state government’s entry into post-elementary education, they do not explain the selection policy. How were the prospective students, most of whom were female, chosen? What were the expectations concerning the kind of student who might enrol? What was the Education Department looking for and how did the entrance requirements reflect this?

The fortunate few

In 1905, entry to the MCS was achieved in most cases on merit, but also on potential, a more subjective assessment based primarily on the recommendations of school principals. By 1906, anticipating considerable interest in non-denominational post-elementary education, the Department ruled that in the event of a large number of applicants an examination would be held to select the best students, each of whom had to be over the age of fourteen. Although the entrance policy was strict, it was flexible enough to cater for students coming from a range of schooling experiences, for the policy makers recognised that there were different educational pathways in the early twentieth century. Prospective students required the Merit Certificate, formally awarded upon successful completion of the final year of elementary schooling. Those without the Merit Certificate had other options open to them, including a pass at the primary examination of the University or satisfying an inspector of schools as to their competence to undertake the course of instruction.

Importantly, prospective students had to be of good health and character and to have demonstrated a marked aptitude for teaching. Each student was required to demonstrate, by means of a written reference from a minister of religion or a school principal, a good character and work ethic. The Director of Education, Frank Tate, was looking for the ‘right’ kind of student. He wanted committed, intelligent, physically fit and highly respectable young women and men entering the teaching profession and, perhaps, continuing on to university. He also wanted students who would not waste the opportunity of a good secondary education, who would successfully pass the university examinations and challenge their dominance by the private and corporate schools. Tate, along with Joseph Hocking, knew that Victoria’s first state high school had to prove itself worthy to everyone.

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29 The idea of merit encompassed excellence and desert, applying to those who had the potential to pass the Junior Public examination—the possibility of failure had to be excluded as far as possible.
30 *Education Gazette and Teachers’ Aid*, 20 November 1906, p. 70.
31 *Education Gazette and Teachers’ Aid*, 20 February 1905, p. 126. See also *Ours*, 1907.
32 See Selleck, *Frank Tate*, Chapters 7 and 8.
who had fought so hard against the state entering the field of post-elementary schooling in the first place.\textsuperscript{33}

The final obligation for enrolment was the payment of school fees, which were set at six pounds per annum. Ostensibly, the Continuation School’s mission was the education of the state’s future teachers, but it also quickly sought to offer opportunities for students with the intellectual capacity but not the money to go on to university via the traditional private school route. At the time, only a handful of state school students were able to enter the university by winning an exhibition or a scholarship, so the Continuation School was somewhat influential in expanding higher educational opportunity.

In 1905, the state approved twenty-five scholarships, providing free tuition for two years for state elementary school students who aspired to enrol at the Continuation School but could not afford the fees.\textsuperscript{34} Initially the scholarships were allocated on the basis of merit by a board of trustees, but competitive examinations were soon organised when too many girls and boys applied. Scholarship winners carried a hefty load of expectations and the intense competition meant that any idleness or misconduct could result in the withdrawal of a scholarship.\textsuperscript{35} The pressure to apply oneself and to succeed was always present. Moreover, the idea of privilege was strong for those pioneering students, not just because they might have received a scholarship to the Continuation School, but because they were there at all.

**Melbourne Streetscapes: Travelling to school**

\textit{My father made me travel first class into the city because in those days it wasn’t done for a girl to travel second class on the trains.}\textsuperscript{36}

On the first school day in 1905 the girls and boys who set out from all over Melbourne to make their way to Spring Street were, whether they realised it or not, making history. Whatever they might have anticipated that first morning, it was the unexpected sights and sounds of continuing building work that greeted them as they entered the school gates. Renovations were still in progress and everyone had to negotiate piles of dusty building materials.

\textsuperscript{33} J. Hocking in \textit{Report of the Minister of Public Instruction 1905–06}, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{34} See \textit{Report of the Minister of Public Instruction 1904–05}, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Education Gazette and Teachers’ Aid}, 20 November 1906, p. 70.
\textsuperscript{36} Interview with Jean Ayres (Fenton), 4 March 2003. As it happened, according to women who were interviewed for this history, more students travelled second class than travelled first class to balance out the total costs of receiving a secondary education. Although significantly cheaper than the costs of a private education, the cost of educating a child at the Continuation School could equal as much as a quarter of a man’s annual income depending upon his employment. Many girls’ fathers were blue collar workers. See enrolment registers from 1905, MGHS Archive.
rubbish and compete with the constant, reverberating drumbeat of hammers and the shrill screams of saws during the first months of school. The Old Model School looked more like a cluttered construction site than a respectable place of learning as it was gradually renovated for a new and higher purpose.

The first generation of the Continuation School students came from both sides of the Yarra River. A few came from well-to-do parts of Melbourne, but far more came from the expanding middle-class areas of Hawthorn, Brighton, Gardenvale, Malvern and Camberwell. Others came from the new working-class suburbs of Northcote, Coburg, Preston and Brunswick\(^{37}\) and the old inner-city ones of Fitzroy, Prahran, South Melbourne, Carlton and Richmond which, by the time of the First World War, had become working-class enclaves for large settlements of European immigrants, with some pockets of middle-class homes. The 1905 student population also included several girls and boys from country Victoria (some from schools that had less than a dozen pupils), and by 1906 almost one third of the total student enrolment lived further than twenty miles from the GPO in Melbourne. This included towns and cities in the Goulburn Valley, the Mallee region, Tambo, Geelong and Dandenong, as a pupil pointed out in verse in the first edition of the school magazine, *Ours*.\(^{38}\) By 1912 the main catchment areas for the majority of Continuation School students were the elementary schools at Princes Hill, Brighton Road St Kilda, Clifton Hill, Camberwell, Fairfield, Carlton, Richmond, North Fitzroy and North Melbourne, yet students came in from more than forty metropolitan elementary schools that year. By 1924 the majority of the students came from metropolitan Melbourne (mostly from central schools), but that year there were still twenty-four successful enrolments from country Victoria.\(^{39}\)

Melbourne had endured a long and sapping heat wave throughout the summer of 1905 and parts of country Victoria had experienced a harsh bushfire season. Fortunately for the students and staff, the temperature on the first school day was a comfortable 70° Fahrenheit (about 21° Celsius). Many students had to leave home as early as seven o’clock to make their public transport connections and reach school on time—a common theme of student

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\(^{37}\) These suburbs were the ones favoured by European immigrants (mostly British) during the first decade of the twentieth century. In the 1930s and the post-World War II era, immigrants settling in these suburbs were predominantly continental Europeans. See Judith Smart, 1993, ‘Melbourne: City and Dominion Capital’, Draft chapter for monograph *Melbourne: A Dominion Capital at War*, not published. Copy in P. Parker’s possession.


\(^{39}\) Enrolment Registers, MGHS and MHS Archives.
experience in subsequent decades. Some girls and boys might have travelled by horse and carriage, still a conventional form of transport in 1905, but few would have had the luxury of arriving at school by car, ownership of which was out of the reach of all but the wealthy. Travel often took a large part of the school day, but students found that they could use their time on the train and cable car (the precursor of the modern tram) to read and study—sometimes school work and sometimes (unobtrusively of course) the opposite sex. For those coming from further out, from the south and the eastern and western suburbs, a journey on a cable car usually followed a train ride, with a final hike through a city centre busily preparing for a new working day.

Girls and boys who lived closer to Spring Street could walk to school to save the cost of a fare (a useful way of generating spending money by those who rarely had any), while those who travelled into the city by train might have varied their regular walk from the station to school. They could, for example, set out north along Flinders Street, passing Young and Jackson’s hotel and St Paul’s Cathedral, the Ball & Welch department store and the Herald & Weekly Times building. The walk along Spring Street led them directly past Kyte’s Baths where Miss McGuiness was the resident masseuse. Further along, Madame Narik’s Costumière would have offered lively relief from the work-a-day world of the Accordean Pleating Works, livery stables, undertakers and butcher shops and the sixty-three or so medical and dental practices at the top end of Collins Street. Perhaps some of the students would have avoided Lonsdale Street in those early years with its less inviting Steam Bellows Works, tanneries, leather merchants, ironmongers and coppersmiths. Latrobe Street with its sporting stables, shoeing forge, tallow merchant, carriage manufacturer and Men’s Lodging House might not have drawn the interest of young girls either.

Some students had the added challenge of negotiating their way through the red light district near Spring and Little Lonsdale Streets, notably the boys for the girls were soon forbidden to approach the area. According to J. F. A. Inch in his 1974 thesis on Melbourne High School and secondary education in Victoria, ‘[T]here was often a verbal exchange between the boys and the prostitutes sitting on their small verandas waiting for customers’. This area was ‘outcast Melbourne’ as Judith Smart explains in her unpublished research on

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40 ‘The close of the Edwardian period saw cars competing with but not yet replacing the horse that clattered over the wood-paved and bluestone streets of Melbourne Town (1914)’. Patsy Adam Smith, 1978, Victorian and Edwardian Melbourne From Old Photographs, John Ferguson, Sydney. Adam Smith also notes that Cobb and Co. coaches continued to make runs through central Melbourne until 1924.

41 See the State Library of Victoria for maps of central Melbourne listing each business.

Melbourne, ‘housing the poor, the prostitutes and the despised Chinese, together with small groups of Aborigines and other non-British individuals’. It was a morally dangerous space for respectable girls in the early decades of the twentieth century.

It was not only day students who had to negotiate morally risky spaces, however, for the students attending the evening and weekend classes also had to travel to and from Spring Street. The junior public certificate evening classes that began in May 1905 were held between seven and ten o’clock, and most young women travelled to and from Spring Street, often alone, on public transport. By June that year, the moral safety of both the female and male students was considered to be at serious risk when it was reported that some of the four hundred students attending night classes were being accosted by prostitutes who loitered about the Spring Street gates leading into the school. The Chief Commissioner of Police was asked to redress the problem and he did so in pragmatic and frugal fashion by suggesting that a street lamp to illuminate the area would ward off any undesirables.

‘Women of bad character’ were not the only problem students might encounter on the way to school. They could also expect to come across in the streets a range of behaviours, which, while considered rather ordinary by some, were regarded as highly offensive by others. The poor going about their business, with some scratching a living on the city thoroughfares, were becoming increasingly noticeable to middle-class folk making their way along city streets. Spitting and larrikinism were prime concerns for police around Flinders Street Station, particularly alongside the cab ranks. Bourke Street had similar problems. A busy thoroughfare, with the popular Coles Book Arcade drawing the enthusiastic interest of students, it was an area where expectoration was regarded as a growing social nuisance. There was, as newspapers of the day reveal, apprehension about what ladies’ skirts might pick up as they swept along the pavements, a concern sharpened by a general public fear of tuberculosis. Rubbish on the streets of central Melbourne was another problem for pedestrians throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century, with animal droppings, factory waste, refuse boxes without coverings and accumulated street sweepings

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44 Letter from the Secretary of the Director of Education to the Chief Commissioner of Police, 8 June 1905, VPRS 10249, Unit 50.
regarded as obstacles not just to safe passage; they were also considered offensive to the eyes and noses of the ordinary pedestrian.\textsuperscript{46}

There was also a growing public concern about the increasing numbers of hawkers in the city streets. Hawkers became so common along Swanston Street that their bawling created a racket, which, in turn, provoked constant community protest. Flinders Street Station was another favourite haunt of noisy hawkers and their presence was loudly lamented, according to historian Andrew Brown-May, as ‘an eyesore at the gates of Melbourne’. Begging in the city grew noticeably in 1907, and 1912 is noted as a year that was ‘particularly bad for women being accosted on Melbourne’s streets’.\textsuperscript{47} As Brown-May observes of the early decades of the twentieth century: ‘The city was predominantly male space’\textsuperscript{48} and it was into that space that the students of Victoria’s first state high school came.

**Education and family sacrifice**

\textit{Around 1905 the average weekly wage for an adult male was the equivalent of $4.35 for a working week of almost 50 hours. Adjusted for inflation, this translates into around $217.00 in today's money.}\textsuperscript{49}

\textit{It was the aspirations of the parents who confounded the plans of Frank Tate, the Director of Education in Victoria. The children of farmers, shopkeepers, engine drivers, carpenters and clerical workers wanted to become teachers or take on the higher level clerical positions in the banks, commerce and industry. These were the new groups who sought a secondary education for their children, and they did not seek their children’s advancement up the social scale through the technical and industrial courses provided in the new secondary schools.}\textsuperscript{50}

Post-elementary education came at a cost for some families. In addition to the six pounds per year compulsory school fee, country families faced additional sacrifices to educate their daughters, who had to have somewhere safe and respectable to live if they were to move to Melbourne. From the outset, parents relied heavily on the generosity of school staff to find suitable board for their children. Under the guidance of their principal, Joseph Hocking,

\textsuperscript{46} Brown-May,\textit{ Melbourne Street Life}, p. 86. Consumption, or tuberculosis, was a serious problem until 1910 in Melbourne.

\textsuperscript{47} Brown-May,\textit{ Melbourne Street Life}, pp. 82 and 212.

\textsuperscript{48} Brown-May,\textit{ Melbourne Street Life}, pp. 82, 86, 161, 168–9 and 212.


staff members personally assessed in their own time local homes for their suitability as potential boarding premises, and a list of possible accommodation was prepared. With board costing between ten and fifteen shillings a week, an education at the Continuation School was ultimately accessible only to those who could afford to pay for the privilege. Scholarships did not cover accommodation or living expenses, which meant that parents could face a total bill of sixteen to eighteen pounds per term. It was a family’s choice to send a girl on to further education once she had reached the official school leaving age and, as a result, a sense of privilege was strong among the female students, as they might just as well have been apprenticed to a dressmaker.

There were also significant non-monetary costs to families. In addition to living and tuition charges, country parents faced the anxiety of placing their daughters in lodgings in Melbourne, relinquishing direct parental control of them at a critical time in their daughters’ lives. Not all country girls had to board with strangers, however, for there were often relatives, uncles and aunts, and grandparents willing to take them in. Some students lived in supervised hostel accommodation run by the Salvation Army and the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) in Richmond, and this continued until the First World War. These hostels became fruitful meeting grounds for some girls and boys who met there as students and later married.

It is hard to imagine from the context of the present what it was like for these girls and young women without imposing present-day concerns upon their experiences. However difficult it might have been for the pioneering state high school students and may appear to be from the perspective of a century later, their own stories suggest that they handled what life presented to them. They ‘just got on with it’ and ‘did what had to be done’, to use their words. That said, it was the school principal who set the overall tone and culture of the school, and the headmistress who shared the responsibility of inculcating the values, attitudes and practices that shaped the school’s identity.

To appreciate what it was like to be a student at Victoria’s first state high school, particularly a female student, it is important to get to know the heads, for the assumptions and values they prioritised as leaders shaped the school’s culture. As heads, they were role models for both teachers and students. What they set out to do within the constraints of the developing state education bureaucracy, a highly gendered and officious establishment, and

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how they were experienced by their students, can shed light on what was important in the education of girls and women in the early decades of the twentieth century. School heads were not always as visible in the daily lives of their students as might be imagined. Joseph Hocking, for example, did not teach and confined himself to his office for a major part of the school day to carry out administrative and disciplinary tasks, except when he was showing visitors around the school and visiting the cookery centre where his lunch was prepared by the female students. Hocking also carried out some inspectorial duties when required, which occasionally took him away from school. Headmistress, Margery Robertson, on the other hand, taught day and night classes, did regular yard duty and was far more visible and physically present in the daily lives of the students.

The Continuation School was ‘splendidly and ruthlessly staffed’, as R.J.W. Selleck stated in his biography of Frank Tate, Victoria’s first Director of Education. In an audaciously undemocratic move, the pioneering Tate selected the principal without advertising the position, thus intensifying criticism of him as he steered the state into the field of post-elementary education. Tate chose Joseph Hocking, confident that he possessed the right qualities and experience for the position, but their relationship deteriorated when Hocking proved difficult to work with. Rubina Gainfort, a Continuation School pupil in 1905 and later principal of Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School from 1949 to 1955, once described Joseph Hocking as a ‘petty-minded dictator who assumed to himself total authority and gave all instructions’. If this is how the young Rubina recalled her principal, how might other students have experienced his headship and what effect, if any, did it have on them as state secondary school girls? What motivated Joseph Hocking? How did he conceptualise his role and organise the school for those who followed him, and how did Margery Robertson cope as headmistress in a setting that blatantly favoured male teachers professionally, socially and economically?

**Joseph Hocking**

For the first time in the history of Victoria young teachers begin their career in favourable circumstances.

Joseph Hocking, 1905

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53 Selleck, Frank Tate, p. 156.
54 See Selleck, Frank Tate, p. 257.
56 J. Hocking, Education Gazette and Teachers’ Aid, 20 May 1905.
The headmastership of the first State secondary school had been offered to me, and the honour associated with the offer could not be ignored.

Joseph Hocking, 1907

The principal was Mr Hocking, who commanded enormous respect, and then Mr Claude Searby, another disciplinarian.

Linda Cuthill (Pump), 1920s

There are few glimpses of Joseph Hocking’s early life, but we do know that he was born in Cornwall in 1861 and was at one time a Methodist lay-preacher. A pupil-teacher at the age of sixteen, his early teaching assessments paint a picture of him as a somewhat pedestrian young teacher. School inspectors describe him as useful and plodding, but there are also tentative forecasts of a promising future. By the time of his first appointment as head teacher in 1891, inspectors determined that he had the ‘right stuff’, describing him as a maturing, determined young teacher, a firm disciplinarian, efficient and thorough, faithful, reliable and honest, and well able to engage his pupils in thinking and learning; he was a proficient teacher and an Hon. man. Hocking was also ambitious, with a drive tempered by an unflinching sense of duty. He was a man deeply honoured by his appointment and determined to be a success. The idea of the pioneering state principal would have appealed greatly to him, a man with an almost sacred sense of occasion—which was, in all likelihood, what the establishment of the Continuation School represented in his mind.

As principal of the Continuation School, Joseph Hocking was relatively low in the pecking order of the budding state education bureaucracy. Within his school, however, he was firmly in control. He administered according to Education Department policy and regulations, drawing on whatever he had at hand, including his own character, to organise his school and ensure its success. As principal he was in a privileged position, with the authority to establish the school’s traditions and through them its tone and ethos. There were for him, however, no comparable models to emulate. He did not draw on available models within Australia such as the Fort St. schools for girls and boys in Sydney (which derived from the

58 Linda Cuthill (Pump), Palladians Newsletter (PN), 1994.
60 Teacher Record, J. Hocking, VPRS 13718.
61 Hocking’s correspondence with the Department, his reports in Ours and his annual principal’s reports reveal his beliefs as an educator and a leader as well as his personal and professional ideas and ideals.
Model School established in 1849 and are now Fort Street High School)\textsuperscript{62} and the Advanced School for Girls in Adelaide (which was incorporated into the new Adelaide High School in 1908).\textsuperscript{63} Hocking looked to the English public and grammar schools as the benchmark of successful school headship.

An admirer of the English public school ethos, Hocking modelled himself painstakingly on the English public school headmaster, in time imagining himself as embodying the school and all that it stood for. He distanced himself from his staff, this separation defining his position and emphasising his authority above all. In a spirit of romantic idealism fuelled by a deep sense of duty, he may well have regarded such separation as a necessary sacrifice of headship as he set about defining and establishing the tone and rigour of the school. He spoke of it as ‘his school’,\textsuperscript{64} demanding that each teacher and student live up to the high personal and professional standards he set. He was indefatigable in his pressure on the students to embrace a school spirit that exemplified a strong sense of duty and responsibility.

For Hocking, the school motto ‘Honour the Work’ was directly related to the tone of the school. In his 1907–08 annual report to the Minister of Public Instruction, he explained why he selected this motto, illustrating what was important to him:

> The tone of a school is felt in its public opinion, which becomes a healthy moral force in acting in the direction of right. Duty is spelt with capitals, honour is prominent in the school code, healthy sentiments prevail, pupils bring to the school their best; in the words of the immortal Thring, they ‘honour the work’.\textsuperscript{65}

Edward Thring, headmaster of the English public school Uppingham between 1853 and 1887, influenced and shaped Joseph Hocking more than any other educationist. Thring believed that ‘in the concentrated purpose and unbending will of the headmaster lay the secret of his success’\textsuperscript{66} and ‘unbending’ became a core aspect of Hocking’s professional

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\textsuperscript{62} See \url{http://www.fortstreet-h.schools.nsw.edu.au/}, accessed 11 December 2005.  \\
\textsuperscript{63} See \url{http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adelaide_High_School}, accessed 12 December 2005.  \\
\textsuperscript{64} This might have been a response to the urging of Frank Tate following his visit to New Zealand to observe the condition of education there. Upon his return to Melbourne, Tate urged everyone to identify with their school as ‘our school’ rather than as ‘the state school’. Hocking’s strong sense of identity with the school as its first principal made him think of it as ‘his school’, although there is nothing sinister in this. \textit{Education Gazette and Teachers’ Aid}, 20 July 1928, p. 172.  \\
\textsuperscript{65} J. Hocking in \textit{Report of the Minister of Public Instruction 1907–08}, p. 70.  \\
\end{flushleft}
demeanour, defining his overall performance as principal. He embraced an autocratic style of management and discipline and this was the dominant image of him in former students’ recollections of their school days.

Joseph Hocking’s headship was in many ways a protectionist one and, in reinventing himself as an embodiment of the Continuation School’s ethos and principles, he expected his staff and students to do the same, thus privileging and protecting the high moral virtues and conformist principles upon which the school was meticulously constructed. But his vision of how the principal of the Continuation School should be, whilst noble, was frequently impractical in the context of the bureaucratic structures shaping post-elementary education in Victoria. It soon caused tensions between him and his teaching staff. Those whom he ‘imperiously disciplined’, according to R.J.W. Selleck, included Margery Robertson, and he did not hesitate to seek the intervention of the Education Department ‘when teachers did not fall in with his requirements’.67 As a student in 1905, Rubina Gainfort, as we have seen, was unimpressed with his autocratic style of leadership, regarding him as petty and intolerant.68 Indeed, on one occasion, a teacher complained formally that he wrongly chastised her in front of her class, humiliating her and diminishing her in the eyes of her students. Her protest was unsuccessful but Hocking was not impressed, and perhaps taken-aback, that she had made a formal complaint in the first place.69 Examination of Hocking’s correspondence with the Education Department and families suggests, by present standards at least, a lack of empathy and tolerance in his dealings with parents who could not meet their financial obligations to the school. On one occasion, for example, Hocking was admonished by the Director of Education when he posted on the school notice board a list of names and addresses of students whose parents had not paid their school fees on time. He defended his actions, but took umbrage when the Director refused to divulge the names of those families that had complained about him.70

and was a proponent of the idea that students should study beyond the traditional mathematics and classics curriculum. This idea was adopted by Hocking and his staff. Thring also pioneered the introduction of music into the curriculum as a ‘refining and elevating influence’. See Parkin, Edward Thring, p. 305. Music was introduced to the curriculum in the early years of the MCS. Thring’s major works were Education and School (1867) and The Theory and Practice of Teaching (1883).

67 Selleck, Frank Tate, p. 183. See also Beatrice Fincher, ‘Biography of Margery Robertson’, MGHS Archive.
68 Fincher, ‘Biography of Margery Robertson’.
69 See VPRS 10249 Unit 28.
70 See VPRS 10249 Units 28 and 32.
Frank Tate often had to bring the inflexible principal into line, arguing at one point that Hocking was having a ‘repressive influence on the school’. What Tate may not have understood was that Hocking believed fervently in the efficacy of the Departmental rules and regulations. When he was given a directive, such as that of 24 September 1908 advising him to see that fees were paid using ‘such steps as he considers advisable’, he most likely took this literally, understanding it to be a mandate to ‘do what needed to be done’. To be questioned about his tactics might well have confused and frustrated him. Duty was duty for Joseph Hocking, and rules were rules. The idea that a Departmental regulation could be subject to reinterpretation to reflect individual circumstances troubled him and he quickly sought clarification from the Department to stave off any ambiguity that might threaten his authority.

There was a political side to Joseph Hocking that saw him commit enthusiastically to teacher unionism—he was a dedicated activist and often a thorn in the bureaucratic side. Hocking was relentless as president of the Victorian High School Teachers’ Association (VHSTA), locking horns further with Frank Tate, who took offence at the tenor of the Continuation School principal’s letters to the Department. Hocking impetuously offered to resign as principal early in 1909, almost certainly without any thought that it might be accepted. His resignation was accepted, however, and immediately withdrawn on the more considered advice of his former school inspector and mentor, William Hamilton. Frank Tate nevertheless spent a great deal of time at the Continuation School, not only to enjoy cooked lunches provided by the girls in domestic arts classes. He also took pleasure in the experience of being a part of the school he had worked so hard to create, and he felt compelled to keep an eye on Hocking to moderate his style of headship.

Joseph Hocking was a typically paternalistic headmaster, often romanticising the experience of being at the Continuation School in his annual reports to the Minister of Public Instruction and through his editorials in the school magazine Ours. In both forums he spoke eloquently and proudly of his staff, even though he treated them severely in the everyday life of the school. He also used the school magazine to initiate its readers into the life of the school through his often poetic descriptions of school life and school spirit. Hocking

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71 Selleck, Frank Tate, pp. 205–7.
72 Memo to J. Hocking from F. Tate, 24 September 1908, VPRS 10249 Unit 28. Two months later all fees were paid. Hocking’s official correspondence suggests a man with a very literal interpretation of Departmental regulations and practices.
73 VPRS 10249 Units 28 and 32.
74 Selleck, Frank Tate, p. 183 and pp. 236–7.
75 Selleck, Frank Tate, p. 168.
considered it his duty to share his knowledge, opinions and experience in every forum available to him, from teaching practice to junior teacher wages, and he regularly made recommendations concerning educational practices and processes.\textsuperscript{76} He expected his reports to have some influence on educational policy because of his position but, in practice, his influence was confined to the school and the VHSTA.

Joseph Hocking’s aspirations for his school were tested when structural problems appeared throughout the building soon after it opened in 1905. Renovations undertaken so hurriedly to get the building ready for the new school year proved to be of poor quality. The principal was forced to appeal to the Education Department to redress the situation, eventually suggesting in 1916 that a new site for the school be considered.\textsuperscript{77} To shock an unresponsive Education Department into action, Hocking posted off fragments of fallen masonry, but the Department remained unresponsive.\textsuperscript{78} He must have felt extremely frustrated as the matter continued to be discussed in the newspapers and in parliament without any resolution. One parent withdrew his son from the school because he feared for the child’s safety.\textsuperscript{79} Little changed and the school continued to fall into disrepair. Evie Wallace, a student at Spring Street in 1924, recalled the constant dangers of moving from room to room never knowing what ‘surprise’ students might encounter from above and below. ‘We used to go upstairs, these rickety steps, and pass over gully traps that had dead rats in them. The smells…’\textsuperscript{80}

There was another issue that concerned Hocking as debate about the school’s structural condition continued—the possibility that the school might be split along gender lines as opinions concerning the virtue and consequences of co-education began to gather momentum in public debate. Victorian independent schools were single-sex schools, organised on the principle that girls and boys should be educated separately, and there were state policy-makers who believed that girls and boys were psychologically and biologically too different to be educated together.

An extension of that view was a belief that the presence of girls in classrooms distracted boys from learning, a belief that would later justify the decision to split the school, the very outcome Hocking feared and fought, as the following story illustrates. In 1919, Ada Bickford (later Dame Ada Norris) approached the principal seeking permission to organise a

\textsuperscript{76} J. Hocking, \textit{Report of the Minister of Public Instruction 1905–06 and 1906–07} and his reports in \textit{Ours}.
\textsuperscript{77} His suggestion was not considered, although the need for a new site was accepted by the 1920s.
\textsuperscript{78} See VPRS 10249 Units 28 and 32. See also Inch, \textit{Honour the Work}, pp. 26–8.
\textsuperscript{79} Inch, \textit{Honour the Work}, pp. 26–28 and VPRS 10249 Unit 28.
\textsuperscript{80} Interview with Evie Wallace, 9 August 2002.
lively debate on rule number one, the rule that forbade any communication between the sexes. According to Dame Ada, Hocking refused permission but took the girls aside to explain. ‘He was very considerate about the whole thing’, she recalled when interviewed in 1982. ‘He explained to us that the move towards single-sex schools was so strong that he had a full-time job maintaining that the school should remain co-educational.’

There was a previous occasion back in 1907 when Hocking had resisted expectations that he would allow his female students to participate in a cookery competition at the celebrated Exhibition of Women’s Work held in Melbourne that year. Concerned that such a frivolous (non-academic) competition would interfere with the girls’ studies, Hocking refused to allow them to compete. This suggests both a respect for the girls’ academic potential and a resolve to ensure that nothing should affect the school’s increasingly excellent academic reputation. As former Mac.Rob student Lesley Scholes argued, ‘Hocking refused to encourage his girls to be cajoled by prizes for domestic drudgery which was essentially work for the “greatness” of women’.

In the midst of these problems, the Continuation School produced outstanding results at the university examinations for the junior and senior public certificates. From the outset at the 1906 examinations the school surpassed other secondary schools throughout the state, a cue for Hocking to begin a tradition of honouring successful students by calling special assemblies to mark their achievements. Deeply sensitive to public perceptions of the school, Hocking used his students’ success at the examinations as ammunition to respond to criticisms levelled at state secondary education and at his school in particular. In his report to the Minister of Public Instruction in July 1912 he defended the existing system of state high schools in Victoria with passionate, heroic eloquence, his language that of battle and loyalty, of opponents vanquished, of aspects of the school imperilled and expectations surpassed as he described the school’s accomplishments. In a final coup de grâce, he attacked the independent schools, systematically pointing out their failures and limitations while triumphantly proclaiming the state high school to be a success, without academic

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81 Interview between M. Jacomb and Dame Ada Norris (Bickford), 1982.
82 Letter from J. Hocking, 19 September 1907, VPRS 892.
83 Lesley Scholes, 1984, ‘Education and the Women’s Movement in Victoria 1875–1914’, PhD Thesis, University Of Melbourne, Melbourne, p. 436. Hocking could not control the secondary curriculum where girls were forced to study cookery and needlework (although he did enjoy having his daily lunches made by the girls in cookery classes), but he could exercise his authority and stop the girls from participating in outside activities that might interfere with their academic work.
84 See Appendix 1.
85 See Ours, 1907.
parallel in its achievements and in the excellent moral calibre of the young women and men it sent out into the world.\textsuperscript{86}

Joseph Hocking retired in 1923, never having been part of the Departmental decision-making hierarchy—a disappointment perhaps for a man with his depth of educational experience. In his biography of Frank Tate, R.J.W. Selleck described camping trips enjoyed by Frank Tate, Claude Searby, Martin Hansen (a future Director of Education) and others, on which educational issues and policy were discussed; Joseph Hocking was never a part of that social and professional circle.\textsuperscript{87} Perhaps his union activities to improve teachers’ working conditions did not endear him to those in authority within the Education Department bureaucracy and served to set Hocking further apart from his superiors than he already was. Joseph Hocking persisted in playing a role in education after his retirement, however, joining the MLC Council. His presence was welcome but he exerted little influence.\textsuperscript{88} A quiet family man, he was survived by his daughter at whose home he died on 12 September 1947 at the age of eighty-six.

Introducing the Continuation School’s first principal has shed some light on experiences of his leadership as he set up the school’s moral, social and educational framework. Memories of Joseph Hocking from the perspectives of former female students are of a distant and forbidding man, a hard man and one with whom the female students had little contact. Responsibility for the girls fell to Margery Robertson, the first headmistress of the Continuation School, yet she is often remembered similarly.

**Margery Fraser Robertson**

*Miss Robertson never had to raise her voice. She would take off her pince-nez and one look at the boys and they would never think of going any further.*

Hilda Blainey (Lanyon) 1920

*How far high failure overreaches the bounds of low success.*\textsuperscript{89}

Margery Robertson

\textsuperscript{86} J. Hocking in *Report of the Minister of Public Instruction 1912–13*.

\textsuperscript{87} Selleck, *Frank Tate*, p. 183.


\textsuperscript{89} Fincher, ‘Biography of Margery Robertson’, p. 4. In an interview with the school archivist in 1982, Hilda Blainey recalled Robertson as saying, ‘How high the bounds of failure overlap the bounds of high success’, illustrating the problems of memory in recalling the past. In this case, however, the meaning of the statements remains the same.
Appointed with Joseph Hocking in 1905 was the older and more experienced headmistress, Margery Fraser Robertson, a woman whose teaching career had prepared her well for her new role. Her appointment reflected Frank Tate’s respect not only for her character, but for what she could bring to Victoria’s first state post-elementary school as headmistress. Initially selected as a temporary mistress, she was appointed senior mistress, second in charge to Hocking, in 1907. Although traditionally referred to as headmistress, she was not officially so designated until 1911.

Margery Robertson was a woman in a man’s world in a highly patriarchal state education bureaucracy; a position mirrored in the organisation and culture of the Continuation School. She did not possess any power commensurate with that of her principal. Her role as headmistress was to ensure the highest moral standards of the female pupils, to monitor the behaviour of the girls and organise their daily academic program, to implement the principal’s directives, and to teach. How she managed that demanding role, and how she was experienced by the female students, sheds light on the complexities of being a woman in a position of minor authority, but with major responsibilities, in an expanding state education system during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Was she a heroic figure for the high school girls? Were they inspired by her in ways that changed their lives in some way? Did she represent some kind of alternative to how her male counterparts fashioned themselves as teachers and moral guardians? What were girls seeking from their teachers as they gained access to post-elementary education?

The oldest of nine children, Margery Robertson was born at Emerald Hill, now South Melbourne, on 1 September 1858, four years after her Scottish-born parents, James and Margaret, migrated to Australia. A joiner by trade, James Robertson carved out a good living in a period of widespread and hectic expansion in building and construction around Melbourne in the wake of the Victorian gold rushes, earning enough to employ a cook for his large family. He died in 1884, but the Robertson women were independent and self-sufficient by then, records showing that they purchased the property known as Inverary in

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90 Louise Mackay, PN, September, 1991.
91 Louise Mackay, PN, September, 1991.
92 Teacher Record, Margery Fraser Robertson, VPRS 10240.
94 Death Certificate of James Robertson.
South Yarra in 1886. Margery Robertson was then 28 years old and the family’s main wage earner, an important role at a time when the Robertsons’ capital was tied up in property.

Margery Robertson passed her Merit Certificate in 1872 at the age of 14. As a maturing girl she had few options for white-collar employment in a society that expected marriage and motherhood of its young women. She was, however, an excellent student, and her headmaster recommended her to the Education Department as a suitable candidate for the teaching profession. The life of a pupil-teacher in the later nineteenth century was demanding, and Robertson taught during the day and studied for her formal qualification before and after school. Her staunch Presbyterian upbringing, with its emphasis on resilience and self-sufficiency, would surely have stood her in good stead along with the enduring support of her family. Presbyterianism, with its narrow, conservative code of laws and regulations demanding the highest principles of conduct and a tough mindset to support them, was influential in shaping moral character, and it was within this culture that the young woman had been raised. The Robertson family attended services regularly at Toorak Presbyterian Church, but, while her sisters were actively involved in church social services, Margery Robertson was not. In all likelihood, she had little time to spare. The young apprentice teacher’s regular teaching assessments were optimistic and in 1878 she qualified to enter the Teacher Training Institution. She was in a privileged position as a full-time student, as few of her peers were able to afford both the fees and the associated living expenses.

As a teacher-in-training, Margery Robertson lived in dynamic times. A new and ‘modern’ spirit had risen in the wake of European industrialisation. Although industrialisation was yet to reach Australian shores, there remained a legacy of social destabilisation in the wake of the Victorian gold rushes, with worried Melburnians using the local newspapers to warn of signs of moral decay in certain sections of society. Among them, the shambolic, life-shattering 1890s depression stirred a yearning for greater moral cohesion and stability, and education assumed a new importance as the mechanism by which the colony’s children

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97 See the Messenger of the Presbyterian Churches of Victoria and Tasmania (Messenger), Arbuckle and Co, Melbourne. See also Aeneas Macdonald, 1937, One Hundred Years of Presbyterianism in Victoria, Robertson and Mullens, Melbourne.
99 This institution closed in 1893 as a result of funding cuts, was then occupied by University High School until 1898 and reopened in 1900 as the Training College for teachers under the principalship of Frank Tate.
could be imbued with higher principle and become efficient, dutiful and useful citizens, thus securing Victoria’s future.\textsuperscript{100} This was the time of the emerging middle class, to whom education was the most important means of self, and economic, improvement. As social historian Janet McCalman demonstrated in her 1993 study of the rise of middle-class Melbourne, the 1890s witnessed the birth of ‘the careful and moral Melbourne middle-class; and for many, disposessed of their savings, their property and their businesses, the long slow climb to comfort and security had to begin all over again’.\textsuperscript{101}

At the Training Institution Margery Robertson came under the instruction of Frederick J. Gladman, a man who had a profound influence on her professional and personal worlds. Gladman, a 39-year-old well-credentialed and respected English educator and writer, arrived from London in 1877 to take charge of the Training Institution for teachers in June that year.\textsuperscript{102} He brought with him a letter of reference from the distinguished English literary figure and educationist Matthew Arnold, son of Thomas Arnold, headmaster of the prestigious Rugby public school. Gladman was particularly inspired by Matthew Arnold’s ideas about culture, and he was convinced that education could allow a person to pursue perfection through knowledge and understanding of the best ideas and knowledge in the world.\textsuperscript{103} For him, education was the true basis of social and moral character. There was a deep resonance between Gladman’s values and those of Margery Robertson, whose religion would have taught her that perfection as a human being could only be acquired with the right mind-set and values. With Frederick Gladman’s argument that education could provide a pathway to that perfection, the importance and value of education, and her vocation as a teacher, were confirmed.

Frederick Gladman had published two texts in England, \textit{School Method} and \textit{School Work},\textsuperscript{104} which mapped out his ideas about the organisation and principles of teaching, including how to manage a school. An underlying pedagogical and moral principle of these texts was that

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{100} McCalman, \textit{Journeyings}, pp. 45–55.
\item \textsuperscript{101} McCalman, \textit{Journeyings}, p. 45 and pp. 50–55.
\end{itemize}
only a good teacher could produce good students, and so the texts became guides for budding young teachers in all aspects of moral life, in addition to providing detailed practical lesson instructions. Gladman contended that discipline was the fundamental element of successful teaching and that obedience to rules and laws was essential in assisting a person to live a good and useful life. He stressed that discipline needed to become a habit, as, once instilled, self-discipline would strengthen character permanently and provide young men and women with the tools for a genuinely contented and productive life. At the Teacher Training Institution Gladman taught that certain principles and organisation of teaching could produce the right-minded, self-disciplined young man and woman with high standards who would, in turn, bring about the virtuous and worthy citizenry that was so needed within this young colony. He taught Margery Robertson and her fellow students the four basic principles of good teaching outlined in his texts, and it is useful to examine them briefly in the context of students’ memories of her at the Continuation and Melbourne High schools.

The first principle stipulated that a teacher should never seek popularity, that she should maintain a respectful distance between herself and her students. Familiarity with one’s pupils was discouraged and former students recall that Margery Robertson never bridged the divide; she would not have even considered such a deviation from expected standards. Aloof and formal in her relations with her students, she is recalled as austere and lonely. The second principle held that a teacher should avoid humour and maintain a serious disposition in public at all times. Robertson usually travelled to the Continuation School by cable car accompanied by another pioneering post-elementary teacher, and future MGHS headmistress, Christina Montgomery. Students recall that the two teachers never conversed in public, whether to greet students or even briefly discuss something as innocuous as the weather. This demeanour carried through to the school yard as the pair did daily yard duty together during the second half of the lunch break. They spoke only to correct a girl’s behaviour. Their duty was vigilance, not familiarity.

The third principle recommended that a teacher avoid any oddity in dress and demeanour, as this might cause distraction among students and teaching colleagues. Margery Robertson was quite a tall woman, and former students recall a striking visual contrast between her and the diminutive Christina Montgomery. Always meticulously groomed, Robertson preferred sedate, darker colours in her outfits, and wore her hair carefully done up as custom

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demanded. Nevertheless, one fashionable adornment was a kind of signature in students’ memories of her—the black velvet band she invariably wore around her neck.

The fourth and final principle stated that a teacher should be fair in her dealings with students. She should make lessons interesting for them so that they could develop their own enthusiasm and desire for learning. As her teacher record illustrates, Margery Robertson was a progressive teacher, who kept up to date with educational ideas and practices. Like many of her female counterparts in the teaching profession, she lived her work and used her spare time to remain conversant with current international educational practices and theories. At the Continuation School, Robertson taught literature to both boys and girls, and she brought the best of British writing into her classroom, not just in the study of selected works, but also in pictures of the authors on the walls, to inspire the students as she lectured to them.107

Margery Robertson believed that it was a duty to aim high in life and she regularly reminded her students that to fail whilst aiming high was far preferable to achieving mediocre success. Not having a university degree was a source of deep regret to her, particularly as her colleagues at the Continuation School had degrees or were studying for one. When Robertson was a pupil-teacher, women were still not accepted at the university and, by 1905, the combination of advancing years, full-time teaching, and her duties as headmistress precluded such a major commitment. As a product of the Frederick Gladman era, however, the headmistress would have ensured that her students understood the importance of qualifications and pushed them to value academic success, not just for personal gratification, but also because it was their duty to achieve their fullest potential.

Margery Robertson spent forty-eight years with the Victorian Education Department and throughout her long career her teaching assessments paint a picture of an ‘admirable woman’. She is described as an accomplished, experienced teacher, who had taught widely in the state education system prior to her appointment to the Continuation School. She had taught classes for matriculation, the civil service and the state school exhibitions in addition to primary school classes—invaluable experience for the Continuation School. Her reports describe her as excellent, superior to the average lady teacher, successful in the classroom, careful, skilful, painstaking and vigorous, a good manager and a firm, successful disciplinarian. Inspectors’ reports repeatedly highlight her disciplinary prowess, confronting the common belief that women were not capable of managing post-elementary school male students, and she often received a mark of 100 per cent for her overall assessment. By 1900

she had reached the highest position possible for a woman in the Department: the second subdivision of class two of the Classified Roll.108

At the Continuation School, the headmistress carved out a niche for herself within a school hierarchy that neither sought nor desired her participation in school management and leadership. Robertson was older than Hocking, with far more teaching experience, but the principal excluded her from decision-making. Perhaps her lack of a university qualification diminished her in her principal’s eyes, or perhaps he considered her moral stature a threat to the dominance of his own.109 In 1909 the pair clashed on the issue of delegation of authority when Robertson was officially appointed senior mistress. Needing to confirm his own authority, Hocking wrote to the Department to clarify her official duties.110 He wanted it in writing that he had the authority to name his second-in-charge in the event of his absence from school. His preference was for the senior master, Claude Searby, even though Margery Robertson’s appointment officially designated her as second-in-charge. The principal got his way when the department ratified his authority in this matter. Joseph Hocking did not consider his headmistress to be his equivalent and he positioned her duties firmly and exclusively within the female school population.

In addition to her teaching duties, Margery Robertson was responsible for supervising the conduct and domestic life of the Continuation School girls,111 a role deliberately defined on gender lines according to the social and moral expectations of the time. Her sphere of influence comprised the classroom, the female students, the female teachers and the female students who were enrolled in the evening classes. Her contribution to the Continuation School, and state education more generally, was primarily the moral guardianship of the school’s reputation. The pressure of lingering predictions that a secular school could never produce the young men or women of impeccable character that the private, corporate and denominational schools had produced so efficiently to that time meant that securing and maintaining the school’s good name was vital. Frank Tate had selected her for that very reason, and her impeccable personal and professional credentials gave a moral legitimacy to the school to rival that of the non–state school sector.

108 Teaching Record of Margery Fraser Robertson, VPRS 13718.
109 Selleck, *Frank Tate*, p. 183.
110 J. Hocking to F. Tate, VPRS 10249 Unit 28, File 09/7038.
111 See correspondence between J. Hocking and the Department regarding Robertson’s duties, VPRS 10249.
Margery Robertson’s responsibilities, as prescribed by her principal and ratified by the Education Department,\textsuperscript{112} required considerable expertise, good judgement and almost infinite energy as she worked within the constraints placed upon her by her principal, and male–dominated society in general. If she ever desired to use her own initiative in school matters she would have had to do so in quiet, subtle ways, but it is unlikely that she would have thought about resisting the principal. The headmistress was responsible for a large number of girls on a daily basis, and departmental records show that she did her job well. In addition to teaching during the day, she was required to be available to teach evening classes, which Hocking set out in writing after confirming with the Department that he was entitled to expect this of her. Evening classes did not finish until ten o’clock most nights, and it was a long day for teachers and students alike. Joseph Hocking relied on Margery Robertson to keep him informed of any matters concerning the female students that might require his attention at any time, so her role was largely monitorial. There was, however, always somebody external to the school willing to inform the principal about incidents of inappropriate behaviour, as the case of young Ruby Baker, recounted in chapter seven, so vividly demonstrates.\textsuperscript{113}

While the headmaster drew on her knowledge of the girls, Margery Robertson was shrewd enough to draw on the female head prefect to monitor the female students. Beatrice Gerrand, head prefect in 1921, recalled that her headmistress told her to report to her daily, presumably to keep her abreast of what was going on within the female student population, just as Joseph Hocking expected Robertson to keep him informed. Beatrice could not recall any important or interesting discussions with her headmistress, however, and their regular meetings did not engender any sense of closeness or special rapport between them. On the whole, Margery Robertson did not endear herself to her students.\textsuperscript{114}

Tradition was important in building the school’s reputation, the production of young ladies being an integral feature of that reputation. To produce the educated, refined young lady, Robertson instituted the social hour, often referred to by former students in later years as the ‘agony hour’—its purpose to give female students some experience of the social graces. The social hour was both a presentation of, and a performance in, higher culture, the culture of upper middle-class gentility. As one-time Mac.Rob teacher Gwyn Dow and former head

\textsuperscript{112} J. Hocking to F. Tate and F. Tate to J. Hocking, VPRS 10249, Unit 28, File 09/7038.
\textsuperscript{113} Ruby Baker was a MCS student who attended evening classes in 1908. She was accused of serious misbehaviour for communicating with a member of the opposite sex during class and being disrespectful to teachers. See VPRS 10249, unit 28 for file on this interesting case.
\textsuperscript{114} Fincher, ‘Biography of Miss Margery Robertson’, p. 4.
prefect Lesley Scholes pointed out in their research on Christina Montgomery, the social hour endeavoured to give girls insight into, and appreciation for, the arts whilst teaching them how to be young ladies. According to R.J.W. Selleck, Frank Tate believed that one of the tasks of the secondary school was to induct children into an ‘Antipodean version of Europe’s high culture’, thus the social hour was an essential aspect of a state high school girl’s general education, of the female curriculum.

The social hour consisted of musical performances, recitations, dancing, charades and singing, and each girl could practise the art of conversation as she tasted the world of the cultured young lady. In looking in on these gatherings in 1906, Joseph Hocking, wearing his paternal hat, was so impressed that he wrote about them specifically in his report to the Minister of Education. ‘Look in upon them [the girls] for a brief moment, row after row of happy, healthful faces, such varied types too, but all with character beginning to limn the cheek.’ He was undoubtedly impressed because the social hour experience would serve to give the young budding professionals a gentility that they might not otherwise learn or acquire. Furthermore, he speculated about the potential power of the ‘gentle influence of the girls’ in the school setting, which perhaps explains, in part, his support for co-education over single-sex schooling. Given girls’ responses to the social hour as ‘agony’, it is likely that these sessions were substitutes for higher culture rather than the real thing, and endured rather than appreciated, even though some might have inspired to higher things.

Margery Robertson retired on 31 January 1922 but maintained a life-long connection with the school. She joined the ex-students’ association and was responsible for strengthening it through increased membership and participation. She was also appointed to the Melbourne Girls’ High School Council and was actively involved in student welfare during the Depression years, tirelessly canvassing city businesses for likely employment opportunities for MGHS girls up to the time of her death on 1 January 1933. As Beatrice Fincher points out, Margery Robertson was influential as an educationist beyond school. She was a member of the committee that revised the program for infant departments (prep–2 levels) and a member of the council of the Emily McPherson College of Domestic Economy. In addition, according to former student Beatrice Fincher, she was ‘one of three departmental

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119 Ours, Pallas (school magazines) and Palladians Newsletters contain many references to the social hour.
representatives on the Victorian Council of Public Education from its inception in 1911, convening a committee the following year which reported that women teachers in other Australian states, and in London, had better promotion opportunities than were available in Victoria'.

The Power of Headship

Headship at the MCS/MHS between 1905 and 1927 was based on authoritarian principles, as the stories of Joseph Hocking and Margery Robertson illustrate. Headship for a man was an opportunity for autonomy and control and for introducing one’s own ideas as far as was possible within the constraints of the developing Education Department bureaucracy; for a woman it was more complex, and rare. For much of the twentieth century, being a school leader in the state education system was partly about carving out a distinctive status and identity for oneself in one’s chosen profession, that identity and status in turn conferring intrinsic authority and power. Neither Hocking nor Robertson was in the position to make policy, although the former did try to influence policy-making in his reports to the Minister of Public Instruction and his articles in Ours, the school magazine. Early headship was very much about tradition and reputation building, about creating a culture of excellence and endeavour, and protecting and preserving them. Joseph Hocking took his role seriously, eventually coming to see himself as embodying the school in his actions, attitudes and beliefs. Both Hocking and Robertson were selected for their positions because of what

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122 See reports of J. Hocking in the Reports of the Minister of Public Instruction 1905–1924. Hocking’s correspondence with the Education Department further reveals Hocking’s construction of headship. See also Selleck, Frank Tate, Chapters 7 and 8 in particular.
they could bring to a school that was very much in the public eye; their characters and identities were crucial in creating school character and identity.\textsuperscript{123}

Early headships of the MCS and MHS were thus autocracies based on respect and deference, with students, teachers and parents expected to submit to the head. In Hocking’s case, there were challenges to his authority when parents communicated directly with the Department. He did not like this since, in his mind, as his correspondence with the Department suggests, it diminished his authority and disturbed his self-confidence. Neither Joseph Hocking nor Margery Robertson went against convention in their positions; rather they upheld conscientiously the conventions of the day, as was expected of them—as was their duty. Joseph Hocking drew on the English grammar and public schools in creating his identity as principal, but Margery Robertson was more restricted, although there were British and Australian private school headmistresses from whom to draw inspiration, and Gladman. As a woman first and foremost, Robertson had to be as society expected a woman in such a responsible position to be. Constrained and yet empowered to succeed by her gender, she was an efficient and successful headmistress. In fact, she was as efficient and assiduous as her male counterparts, sometimes even more so: harder, more austere and severe. In carving out a career in a man’s world, the headmistress adopted many masculine characteristics so that she might be respected and successful in her own right. Perhaps it is a pity, in retrospect, that she is recalled primarily in terms of the severity of her manner and of her extreme strictness and discipline. Nonetheless, this capacity was one of the key strengths looked for in a teacher at that time. By all the standards of the day, social, educational and religious, she was a very successful professional woman, who excelled in her profession and as a contributor to education beyond the Continuation School (later MHS).

**Claude Searby and the Rupturing of Melbourne High School**

Following Joseph Hocking’s retirement, Claude Searby was appointed to head Melbourne High School. Searby was no supporter of co-educational schooling and his appointment in 1924 publicly confirmed that the state was far more interested in, more serious about, boys’ education than girls’ education. Claude Albert Henry Searby was born in Hobart in 1869. As a pupil at Gold Street school in Fitzroy he had his first encounter with an inspiring and influential young teacher named Frank Tate.\textsuperscript{124} At the age of sixteen he became a junior teacher at Clifton Hill State School, once more encountering Frank Tate. This cemented a

\textsuperscript{123} Selleck, *Frank Tate*, p. 156.
\textsuperscript{124} Selleck, *Frank Tate*, p. 39.
relationship that would see their families connected by marriage in later years. Searby went on to teach at the Teacher Training Institution, then spent almost two decades as head teacher of various country schools, during which time he established connections with men who would become influential in the development of state secondary schooling in the twentieth century.\

Unlike the private life of Joseph Hocking, there is more known about the Searby family, and perhaps, when Tate overlooked Claude Searby in selecting the Continuation School’s original teaching staff in 1905, the two men had already discussed the selection process informally as friends and colleagues. R.J.W. Selleck argues that Frank Tate did not play favourites when it came to selecting the staff for the Continuation School, but it is possible that he thought that Searby, at the age of thirty-six, did not quite fit the image of the young, ambitious trailblazing type he had in mind as he went about selecting the school’s first staff. At any rate, Searby’s career path was firmly assured if his inspectorial assessments were anything to go by, and new principals would be needed when the Continuation School had proven itself and other high schools were established.

Claude Searby was eventually appointed to the Continuation School as a second master in 1908, on a three-month trial basis: a conventional practice designed to ensure a candidate’s suitability. The following year he was promoted to the position of senior master, and it was this appointment that impelled principal Hocking to seek official clarification from the Department about his right to nominate Searby above the headmistress, Margery Robertson, to take charge of the school when he was absent. Given his publicly stated preference for single-sex schooling, and his belief that women should not be teaching boys past the age of eleven or twelve, Searby may well have refused to accept a woman in authority over him, thus compelling Hocking to raise the matter with the Department.

Claude Searby’s career advancement was steady, his inspectors’ reports describing him as reserved, intelligent, energetic, and a good disciplinarian. He enjoyed a reputation as an excellent teacher with extensive knowledge and, notably, as his teaching record reveals, the confidence and insight to ‘ask searching questions’. Inspectors described him as excellent in every way: able, efficient, exhibiting sound judgment, highly skilled in teaching and management, and possessing a good grasp of the problems of secondary education. In 1913

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125 For information on Searby see Inch, *Honour the Work*, pp. 31–41.
126 Selleck, *Frank Tate*, pp. 150–60.
127 Selleck, *Frank Tate*, pp. 159–60.
128 Teaching Record of Claude Albert Searby, VPRS 13718.
Searby returned to Melbourne High School from Kyneton where he had gone after leaving the Continuation School in December 1911. His appointment as vice principal became permanent the following year but he was on the move yet again at the end of 1914 to take up the prestigious position of headmaster of the new Essendon High School, where he remained until December 1923.129

In 1924 Searby assumed the headship of Melbourne High School. Soon, the need for a new high school building to replace the dilapidated and dangerous one on the Spring Street site turned into a search for a site for Melbourne’s first state high school for boys. In his previous days at the school Searby had been in a difficult position as an opponent of co-education at a time when his principal supported it. He believed that girls distracted boys from their learning and it was this belief that impelled him to fight for a separate boys’ school rather than a relocation of the existing school. Daisy Searby, his daughter and a much loved teacher at the MCS, later expressed doubts that her father would ever have accepted the position of headmaster if the school ‘had not been fragmented’.130 Claude Searby’s time as principal at MHS in Spring Street must have been difficult for him. As a staunch proponent of single-sex education he also argued that only men were fit to teach boys once they had turned twelve. He could not, however, easily dismiss future headmistress Christina Montgomery’s expertise and success with discipline, particularly when he found himself in testing circumstances with disorderly boys and had to call for assistance. According to former student Ennis Honey, her mother told her that when Christina Montgomery was senior mistress at the Continuation School the headmaster would sometimes ask her to teach boys some of the male teachers could not manage.131

In October 1927 Claude Searby moved the male students and staff to their current premises at Forrest Hill, leaving the girls and the female staff members to an uncertain fate. True to his beliefs, he employed only one woman at the new school, his typist. In a neat twist, Christina Montgomery was allocated a male office secretary when she became permanent headmistress of the girls’ school.132 Searby was not quite finished with Spring Street, however. Having taken much of the furniture and resources, he decided to leave all the typewriters at the girls’ school, requesting in a letter to the headmistress that ‘MGHS provide typing lessons for such boys as required them on Saturday mornings’. Boys’

129 Teacher Record of Claude Albert Searby, VPRS 13718. See also Selleck, Frank Tate, p. 236.
130 Inch, Honour the Work, pp. 34–5.
132 Winifred Lade (Tinkler [‘Tinks’]), PN, 1 December 2004, MGHS Archive.
educational needs were prioritised over those of girls and Searby was not one to compromise his principles. There is, however, one story that suggests that Claude Searby would, in a crisis, temporarily adjust a principle close to his heart. When Miss Armstrong, the mathematics teacher at MGHS in 1929, became ill, a replacement for her could not be found. Searby, in a spirit of collegiality, invited the girls to attend classes with the boys.\textsuperscript{133} It was an important and timely gesture that enabled the girls to continue their studies without losing valuable time.

Claude Searby’s headship of the co-educational MHS was brief, and he, like Joseph Hocking and Margery Robertson, is remembered as a severe and strict head. Much of his time at Spring Street, however, was devoted to preparation for the impending separation, the day when he could take his boys and the male teaching staff to their new home, away from the distracting influence of females.\textsuperscript{134}

In the following chapter the story of the demise of MHS as a co-educational school reveals what the split meant for its female staff and students. Stories of the terrible conditions endured by the girls and their teachers following the boys’ departure are the stuff of heroic myth-making, but heroism does not appear to have been an issue for the girls living through those years. As they tell their stories, often decades later, they are adamant that they just got on with life and did what they needed to do on a daily basis. Heroism, then, comes retrospectively, in the process of recollection and with the knowledge that they survived and prospered.

\textsuperscript{133} Letter to Miss Montgomery from Mr C. Searby, 27 November 1927, VPRS 10275, Unit 128.

Chapter Three

Sites, Struggles and Survival

The locker rooms were like dark caves under the school, with a few naked gas lights, and it was a wonder that we didn’t burn down the school with the candles we used for lights in our lockers.

Linda Cuthill (Pump) 1917 ¹

Everything but the building has gone with the boys.

Christina Montgomery, 1927 ²

In August 1927 the erection of University High School and projected high schools for girls meant that the girls (of MGHS) had to be content where they were.

Barbara Green, 1998 ³

The ceilings in the classrooms were speckled with pens whose nibs were embedded in the plaster, missiles hurled there by earlier students.

Reba Beamish (Howell) 1929 ⁴

In the four years I spend at the school we are taught in three different sites, but throughout these upheavals I am sustained by a sense of security borne of the recognition that the staff remains the same, they have something to offer which I want and need, and that because I am prepared to work, I have something to offer which they appreciate.

Shirley Painter, The Bean Patch. ⁵

When a school, which just happens to be a girls’ school, is ejected from one place after another, several interpretations are possible. Given the uncertainties and threats to Mac.Rob’s existence over the best part of one hundred years, it would be easy to construct

¹ Linda Cuthill (Pump), Palladians Newsletter (PN), August 1994, p. 4.
a triumphal narrative of victory over enormous ongoing obstacles. But the discontinuities Mac.Rob experienced cannot, and should not, be tied neatly together retrospectively in this way, for such a history would reflect present judgements and concerns and patterns that are more apparent than real, rather than the past as it was lived and experienced.

There are many ways to portray all of this, but clues lie in the girls’ and teachers’ own memories of moving from site to site and in how they acted and reacted as students and teachers. Where it might be expected that the moves were negatively experienced, there is another perspective that bears consideration—that the moves were significant and productive for girls’ education, and were recognised as such at the time. Rather than portray the school and the girls as victims of nefarious conspiracies over which they had no control, it is more useful to look at how the moves and threats to the school’s identity were understood and dealt with by those involved, what they meant to the girls at the time and how they affected the school community.

‘The school was falling down around us’.

Joseph Hocking first raised the problem of the deteriorating conditions of the Spring Street building in 1908, only three years after tens of thousands of pounds had been spent on renovations. He persevered with his complaints and protests, but by 1916 he had given up on fixing the problems at the Spring Street site, electing instead to agitate for a totally new accommodation (Australia’s involvement in the 1914–1918 war probably had a substantial influence on the Victorian government’s inaction). As previously mentioned, Hocking wrote to Director of Education Frank Tate proposing a new location for the school. ‘The value of the present ground would be sufficient’, he argued, ‘to erect a new building, and surely there must be a block of unused Government land somewhere which could be put to no better purpose than to become a school site’.

Three years later, in 1919, the issue of what to do with MHS at Spring Street was firmly in the public domain, but had not progressed beyond pontificating by the Department and talk from every direction. There was no action. It was only after a group of girls narrowly missed serious injury in 1923 from falling masonry, and the withdrawal of some students

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6 J. Hocking, Letter to Frank Tate, Director of Education, 26 October 1916, VPRS 3916, Unit 97. See also J. Hocking, Letter to Minister of Public Instruction 24 July 1919, VPRS 3916, Unit 97.
by their parents because of the ever-present threat of serious injury, that the situation took on more urgency.7

In 1919 the Director of Education had presented the government with three options to redress the problems at the Continuation School. He proposed that a new school be built at Elwood, but the estimated cost of £60,000 meant that that this proposal was not viable at the time. Tate also proposed that the state government purchase the old Scotch College site on the corner of Grey and Lansdowne Streets, East Melbourne, since that school was moving to a new site. Another option was to sell the Spring Street site as valuable city real estate. Under this third option, the school would be able to move to a ‘site contiguous with the Amateur Athletics Sports Ground near the Yarra’, as Tate put it.8 The Director’s preference, supported by his close colleagues Martin Hansen and Claude Searby, was, in the end, to build separate schools for the boys and the girls. He pointed out that the Scotch College site was ‘inadequate for a boys’ school owing to the restricted playing area, and while this restriction would undoubtedly be a handicap to a girls’ school, it would not be as serious as in the case of a boys’ school’.9

In 1925 it was decided to build a state-of-the-art school for the boys at Forrest Hill in South Yarra (which cost £100,000), leaving the problem of the girls’ situation still to be resolved. In 1926, the Victorian Premier, Sir Alexander Peacock, suggested that they be moved to the Exhibition Buildings as a temporary measure, but this idea was rejected by his fellow politicians.10 On 27 October 1927 the boys moved out to their new accommodation, described by MLA Thomas Tunnecliffe in Parliament as ‘a monument of extravagance’.11 It ought to be blown up’, he declared.12

8 Tate, Letter to Minister, 24 July 1919, VPRS 3916, Unit 97.
9 Tate, Letter to Minister, 24 July 1919, VPRS 3916, Unit 98.
12 Tunnecliffe, VPD, p. 2070.
Melbourne Girls’ High School at Spring Street

As pupils of Melbourne High School we wish to voice the sentiment of the female portion regarding the new school for our brothers. We are glad to see our contemporary males secure such a lovely building for their future home, but we cannot understand why we are denied a new edifice as well. As it has been the principal of civilised nations that ladies are first, we can’t grasp the fact that the new quarters are for men only. Everybody knows how dangerous the present building is…then why should ‘the weaker sex’ be exposed to the dangers and discomfiture of our grandfathers’ ancient building?

Sixty indignant women 1927

In Victoria to-day we have about 43,000 boys and 42,000 girls between the ages of 14 and 17, reported as not receiving any educational instruction. About 24,000 boys and girls at those ages were reported as receiving instruction in our secondary, technical and other schools.

George Swinburne, 1928

When the boys relocated to their ‘palace on the hill’ in one of Melbourne’s most salubrious suburbs, the girls remained in the decrepit Spring Street building. The entire school was dangerous with the girls and staff forced to negotiate their way around with ever-increasing vigilance. The gas was cut off because of leaking pipes, leaving the school without heating and the domestic science area without working stoves. Rickety staircases were placed out of bounds and on one occasion a small fire was reported. Plaster fell from ceilings, forcing the Department of Public Works to send a truck over to the school once a week to collect the accumulated debris. Yet, in the midst of these ongoing disruptions to the school program, girls tended, by and large, to consider the hazards they endured a source of amusement and relief rather than an irritation or a danger. They ‘just lived with it’, assert former students who are keen to share their experiences of being there. As Ethel Mann recalls, somewhat stoically and with a certain retrospective romanticism, ‘It was in very grave disrepair and, I mean, plaster was literally falling down off the walls…but I loved it

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13 Herald, 2 September 1927.
14 George Swinburne, 1960, The Boy: His Relation to Industry, Swinburne University of Technology Archive, Hawthorn. Swinburne was active in educational debate from 1902 when he had served in the Bent ministry (although he resigned in 1908 because he found Bent impossible to work with) and his was one of many voices publicly emphasising the role education had to play in providing opportunities for working-class children. Swinburne was also a member of the Victorian Council of Public Education. See Alison Patrick, 'Swinburne, George (1861–1928)', in J. Ritchie (ed), 1990, Australian Dictionary of Biography, Volume 12, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, pp 150–52.
15 Argus, 19 August 1930, p. 5 reports on the girls’ high school in shocking disrepair.
This attitude reflects more than happy romantic memories of dark and scary dungeons (the locker rooms that were the scene of many amusing escapades and mimicking of teachers) that are the most immediate memory of many former Spring Street students. These were strong young women prepared to put up with very difficult conditions for the sake of achieving a first-class education.

The poor condition of the buildings meant that student numbers were supposed to be limited even though more and more girls were seeking places. Whereas female enrolments had risen from 345 to 726 with the boys’ departure, correspondence between Christina Montgomery and the Education Department reveals that enrolments were supposed to have been kept under 700 when the Spring Street building was finally condemned in 1931. As school records show, by that date numbers had reached 787, with a slight reduction to 774 in 1932. It was only in 1933, with the school’s relocation to the King Street Elementary School site at West Melbourne that enrolments fell below the cap to 620. With this move, the school lost pupils because some parents were concerned about the amount of time their daughters would have to spend travelling to and from school.

MGHS continued to be on the agenda of parliamentary discussions and, in October 1927, parents petitioned members of parliament for a new school. By this time, however, there was serious doubt within the Education Department about the need for an academic girls’ high school in the metropolitan area at all, as plans for new secondary schools in the developing suburbs were well in motion following extensive lobbying by members of

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17 Interview with Ethel Mann, 3 April 2001.
18 Memo from Victorian Education Department to C. Montgomery, 10 January 1931, VPRS 10275, Unit 128.
19 Pallas, enrolment figures 1927–35.
parliament on behalf of their electorates.20 The fate of the girls’ school rested on the extent of support it could muster to force the state government to keep it going at a time when government budgets were being slashed to make ends meet. The following graph of Victorian Loan Council appropriations for education vividly illustrates the severe decline in government spending during the Depression years.

![State Education Loan Appropriations](image)

Source: Argus, 27 August 1930, p. 5. 21

But, despite economic retrenchment and bureaucratic procrastination, there was increasing community and political support for the establishment of a new school for girls in Melbourne.22 The Victorian High School Teachers’ Association had agitated for a separate girls’ high school as early as 1922, but their deputation to the Minister of Education had come away with no promises.23 Pressure continued nonetheless. The Trades Hall Council added its support to the MGHS school community in March 1929, and the following September a formal deputation called on the new Labor Minister of Public Instruction, John Lemmon, to put its case for a purpose-built school.24 Eventually, possible sites for a girls’ school were identified, but this breakthrough was not automatically a reprieve for MGHS.25

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20 Argus, 27 August 1930, p. 5.
21 The Victorian Loan Council laid down rules, one of which was that no loan money could be spent on any work that would not begin immediately to produce sufficient income to pay for itself. Argus, 27 August 1930, p. 5.
22 VPD, Vol. 182, 14 August 1930, pp. 1775–783. The debates are important in understanding what people were thinking about education, especially girls’ education, at the time, and how politicians sought to represent their constituencies’ needs for better access to secondary schools.
23 Proceedings of VHSTA deputation, 4 September 1922, VPRS 10537, Unit 62.
24 Record of Meeting, VPRS 3916, Unit 98.
25 VPRS 10225, Unit 128. See also Argus, 1 August 1930, p. 13.
Elwood was again proposed on 1 August 1930. Lemmon was authorised by the Treasurer, Ned Hogan, to prepare plans for a new school to accommodate MGHS and some local students. Later that month, a deputation from the Camberwell municipalities, uneasy about the Elwood proposal, ‘waited on the Minister’ to press for a girls’ high school to be built in Camberwell. The argument, as explained in the Argus on 27 September (reporting on the parliamentary debates), was that land had been purchased and set aside some time before for just this purpose and that the government had a contractual obligation to build the new girls’ high school in Camberwell. Counterattacking, the MLA for Nunawading, Robert Gordon Menzies, argued during one of the many parliamentary debates on the fate of MGHS and the future of girls’ secondary schooling in general that having insufficient funds to build another school overrode any contractual obligations. Embedded in all of this discussion was the assumption that the need to ‘provide for’ the girls of MGHS did not necessarily mean that they would maintain their identity as a separate school. Furthermore, the fact that 50 per cent of the MGHS enrolment came from the eastern suburbs in 1930 inevitably tied the school’s future to discussions concerning the building of new state high schools in Melbourne’s east. The possibility that MGHS might be closed and the girls distributed among the existing two higher elementary schools, seven high schools, seven domestic arts schools or three girls’ high schools, was all too real.

In 1931, when the Spring Street buildings were finally condemned by the Department of Public Works, Martin Hansen, Frank Tate’s successor as Director of Education, returned attention to the old Scotch College site. He suggested that it was a perfect situation for a girls’ school, as he had argued back in 1919 when he was Chief Inspector of Secondary Schools. Scotch College’s old dormitories were eminently suitable to a domestic arts curriculum, he assured. Hansen was well aware that MGHS followed a strongly academic

26 See VPD, Vol. 182, 14 August 1930, pp. 1763–764 and pp. 1781–782 (Grievances) for objections to the Elwood site. This VPD also contains an entry referring to the report on the Age 2 August 1930 on the objections to the Elwood site for a new high school to replace MGHS. See p. 1764.
27 Argus, 1 August 1930, p. 13.
28 Argus, 27 August 1930, p. 5.
29 Argus, 27 August 1930, p. 5.
30 Argus, 27 August 1930, p. 5.
33 Martin Hansen had been an applicant for the first staff of the MCS in Spring Street, but he was passed over when Tate and Hocking chose a young group of teachers. Hansen resigned from the Department and returned to teach at his former school, Wesley College, before rejoining the Education Department. Selleck, Frank Tate, p. 119.
34 John Lemmon, VPD, Vol. 182, 14 August 1930, VPRS 3916, Unit 98.
curriculum even though some domestic arts subjects were offered. He was in fact pushing for a separate curriculum for girls, implying that boys and girls should be educated differently. In his mind, as he had indicated in a report to the state government in 1923 of his study of education systems abroad, this opinion was supported by what he had seen in England, where boys and girls were educated separately from the age of twelve.35

Martin Hansen was not a proponent of any kind of education for girls other than one that would fit them well for their future roles as wives and mothers.36 He could not conceive of the possibility that women might be physically and mentally capable of coping with the demands of an academic education, even though the girls of Victoria’s first state high school had achieved outstanding success at the university examinations since 1906. Hansen’s views on the education of girls and boys were in line with a 1918 report of the Council of Public Education, ‘The Education of Women’, presented to the Victorian Parliament that year. The report drew a line between elementary and post-elementary schooling, acknowledging that the needs of girls and boys under the age of twelve were not so different, but asserting that beyond that age, there was a concern:

[The] problem of dealing with the further education of girls is much more complicated than in the case of boys. It is known that every boy should ultimately play some definite part in the world’s activities. The man’s duties as breadwinner and citizen naturally are extended to his home…On the other hand, the main sphere of women is centred on their homes and families…a large number of women do not marry and it is important that their education give them economic independence…[but] the cultivation of the intellect, the preparation for economic struggles, and the development of technical ability should all be subordinate to the strengthening of the moral and physical qualities of our girls.37

The trouble with a separate sphere for girls’ post-elementary education was that there was no consensus about the kind of education to which girls should have access. Those favouring domestic arts schooling for girls linked it to the assumption that the majority of girls would marry and have children. Education for motherhood was a very different matter.

from education for a livelihood, and, as an academic school, MGHS was caught up in this ongoing public debate as it struggled to survive. And yet, despite the uncertainty, the break up of MHS and the ongoing search for appropriate premises for the girls had some positive outcomes. Separation brought substantial advantage from the girls’ perspectives. As some of them wrote in *Pallas* in 1929, ‘It enabled us to find greater outlets for the expression of our personalities. Our numerous clubs help us develop our latent talents and social life is better as well as the fact that girls are now editing *Pallas*. 38 Christina Montgomery, MGHS headmistress, also saw many advantages in the split, and must have been quietly elated when the opportunity to head her own girls’ high school was presented. Not only did it increase women’s promotion opportunities, but it also allowed a woman to head an academic school for girls that might rival its ‘brother’ school MHS as well as the independent girls’ secondary schools.

**Melbourne Girls’ High School at Government House**

*The school’s location was grand—Government House in St Kilda Rd, Melbourne. An equestrian statue of Lord Hopetown, the first Governor-General of Australia, stood outside the main entrance to the grounds. The tall wrought iron gates bore the official coat of arms with the lion and the unicorn carved in stone.*

Ennis Honey, *Nymphs and Goddesses* 39

*That period of time holds indelible memories for me—assemblies held in the magnificent ballroom, lockers, bookstore, classrooms “in the stables”!* 40

Joyce Shields (Cook)

*We had a rule that after each class interval the rooms had to be vacated to let the air circulate and ventilate the rooms for three to five minutes.*

Rubina Gainfort 41

*(A) place to which the girls would sneak if at all possible was what they call the Fairy Dell. A sunken garden of about twelve feet in diameter, it was filled with miniature plants and bushes. The rumour was that it was built for the wife of one of the Governors, a lady who was homesick for England.*

Reba Beamish (Howell) 42

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38 *Pallas*, December 1929, p. 4.
40 Joyce Shields (Cook), *PN*, December 2004, p. 5.
41 Interview with R. Gainfort, 30 September 1982. Gainfort points out that this rule did not apply to the classrooms in the maids’ quarters as it would require the students and teachers to constantly walk up and down the eighty-two step staircase.
When we were at Government House the whole school, practically walked along St Kilda Road to save the tram fare. That included the teachers.

Gertrude Rubinstein (Rabinov) 43

Having decided not to appoint a new state governor during the Depression when Lord Somers decided to retire as governor on 23 June 1931, the Hogan government transferred MGHS to Government House on 19 May 1931. It cost less than £1000 to convert the ground floor and outbuildings into suitable accommodation for the students and staff and just under £700 annually for the Education Department to maintain the school. 44 Government House, modelled on the classic Italian villa and built over a period of four years (1872–76), had the capacity to cater for at least 800 students, but on 30 September 1932 only 681 girls were enrolled. On the one hand the new school site was too difficult for some students to reach by public transport (it was a mile away from Flinders Street railway station) and some parents took their daughters away. 45 On the other hand, some families were simply unable to afford the costs of a secondary education in the context of the continuing worldwide depression. The rooms allocated to the school as classrooms did not, in fact, allow for the accommodation of many more than seven hundred students, so for once the school did not have the worry of trying to squeeze the student population into available rooms.

Dorothy Fry recalls well the logistics of the move to Government House and she brims with admiration for the achievements of the principal, Christina Montgomery, and her staff in organising the move from the old school in Spring Street at minimal notice:

Those women must have worked all through January to shift furniture. And there’s Rubina (Gainfort) standing up there (on the roadway outside Government House). I think there were about seven forms that were sent along the roadway, and then there were the steps up to the ballroom. Rubina

42 Hemingway, ‘Reba’s Story’, p. 38.
43 Interview with Gertrude Rubinstein (Rabinov), 2 October 2002.
44 VPRS 10249, Unit 150. These costs were just 5% of the cost of building a new school, if building new schools had been a possibility at the time. There were only ten high schools in Victoria in 1929; there were also seven domestic arts schools and three girls’ high schools to cater for students beyond elementary level. See A. Max Badcock, ‘Book Five’, Vision and Realisation, p. 495.
45 Girls who did not return to Mac.Rob generally did not return to school at all. Some did, and were enrolled by their parents at Domestic Arts schools when they could not find employment. Focus Group, Salford Park, 27 September 2002.
stood at the top and waited for them and she’d see us right through. But then
Monty (Christina Montgomery) would take assembly in the ballroom.46

Monty was everywhere at Government House if former students’ memories of her are
correct, and, if girls decided to ignore the out-of-bounds rule to explore the magnificent
rose garden, they could always expect to be confronted by their principal. For Dorothy Fry
and her friends, who decided that the risk was worth it, running headlong into a severe
tongue-lashing from the diminutive headmistress was a price they were willing to pay for
their moment of delight in the garden.47

The move to Government House was not without its discontents, with criticism levelled at
the government and the Education Department for using (or misusing) this prestigious site
for a girls’ school. One such complaint came from Edwin Priest who wrote to the new
premier, Sir Stanley Argyle, from ‘The Melbourne’ in Bourke Street, protesting the
misuse and degradation of Government House—‘a royal residence being used as a girls’
school!’48 The Council of Combined Empire Societies expressed similar concern to Sir
Stanley, urging the government to ‘reserve the vice-regal residence for its original and
proper purpose’. Better to have an empty vice-regal residence in times of severe economic
depression than to permit the students of a displaced girls’ high school to diminish its status
by their presence.49

Not being wanted at Government House had little effect on the girls’ experiences,
according to those who were there. Those memories were shaped mainly by the aura of the
buildings and girls’ imaginings of magnificently clad distinguished people and the grand
events held there in the past. The lavishness and splendour of the rooms together with the
overall architectural grandeur evoked images of balls held in the great hall, where elegant
and beautifully dressed women and men whirled across the floor. Most girls were thrilled to
be in such salubrious and romantic surroundings, former students confided decades later.

46 Interview with Dorothy Fry, 27 September 2002.
47 Written memoir of Dorothy Fry, 28 September 1982, MGHS Archive, Unit 16.
48 Edwin Priest, Letter to the Premier, Sir Stanley Argyle, 21 December 1932, MGHS Archive, Unit
12.
49 Dorothy Penberthy, Council of Combined Empire Societies, Letter to Sir Stanley Argyle, Premier
of Victoria, 22 July and 1932 21 December 1932, MGHS Archive, Unit 12. The Council, an
influential collection of conservative lobby and interest groups, comprised the Royal Empire
Society, British Empire Union, British Ex-Service Legion of Australia, the Country Party of
Victoria, Country Party of Victoria (Women’s Section), Melbourne Scots Navy league, Overseas
League, Royal Society of St. George, Sailors and Soldiers Mothers’ Association, Sailors and
Soldiers Fathers’ Association, South African Soldiers Association, the Victoria League in Victoria,
the Victorian Protestant Federation and the Victorian Scottish Union.
The servants’ quarters, the basements and the maids’ quarters behind the ballroom (which was eventually used only for assemblies) were the most popular classrooms for the girls, according to Rubina Gainfort. Poor acoustics meant that the larger rooms were unsuitable for more than one class, something that Gainfort saw as a considerable waste. The teachers preferred the courtyard and the maids’ quarters, though the latter were accessible only by a lengthy climb of eighty-two steps.

Sixty years after being a student there, Dorothy Fry describes the layout of Government House as if it were yesterday:

There was the ballroom and then there were three rooms along the side that we made into classrooms. The beautiful drawing room, which looks over the fountain garden, was the art room. Down a bit off there was the main dining room that had been made into two rooms overlooking a beautiful rose garden. I think Monty’s and Rubina’s offices were the only parts that were in the private rooms. They were on that side of the opening, but we came in always at the back, of course. Then we went up the stairs at the side because we were in the small rooms at the back of the ballroom. There was a band rotunda there and these rooms were at the back of that. And then…the cooking girls. There was the quadrangle at the back, and the cooking girls were in the kitchens there. The D form, that’s Year 9, they were down in the stable area. There was also this bank of oleanders, pink oleanders down near the stables.

Jean Hayes remembers vividly her first day at Government House. The girls needed identification to get past the sentry on guard duty at the gates—their school badge or their enrolment form if it was their first year at MGHS. The first day, for Jean, was a day of sheer excitement spent in the delights of discovering the wonders of a world beyond her previous experience:

The first day we went there, we went up the big drive through the lawns and we were allowed to go anywhere and through any doors. Taken that we were fourteen and fifteen-year-old girls—we went wild. We went in through the entrance…up the stairs and into the royal suite and everywhere. We had a

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50 Interview with R. Gainfort, 30 September 1982.
51 Memoir of Dorothy Fry, 28 September 1982.
ball. This freedom was curtailed the following day, however, and lots of places were put out of bounds.\textsuperscript{52}

Rose Porter thinks of her time at Government House with less joy, however.\textsuperscript{53} Although she loved it, it was not always wonderful being there. ‘In summer it was horrible’, she explains. ‘They transformed the stables into classrooms. It was all painted up and everything. But in the summer it was absolutely unbearable. It was so hot.’\textsuperscript{54} The joys and challenges of being at Government House were brief in the end for, in 1932, the state government decided to reintroduce the office of state governor. MGHS became homeless once more. In 1933, a formal departmental inquiry was initiated to assess the position of the school within the Victorian educational landscape and, following further pressure and lobbying from the school community, a site in King Street, West Melbourne, was officially declared the school’s new home.

**Melbourne Girls’ High School at West Melbourne, 1933–34**

\textit{...and then we were thrown out into West Melbourne.}

Rubina Gainfort

\textit{Many rooms have not any heating facilities whatsoever and some of the fireplaces cannot be used owing to unavoidable crowding of desks and the arrangement of the rooms. Coldness is aggravated by stone floors. In some rooms the sun never shines. All of the classrooms are overcrowded, badly lighted, and mostly badly ventilated. Many scholars during the winter months must be uncomfortably cold.}

Jane S. Grieg, Chief Medical Inspector

\textit{At West Melbourne we had a chamber music group. We used to practise after school in one of the temporary classrooms that had been moved there to accommodate us. Miss Llewelyn used to be there with us. Her deep love of music was very apparent. In those days, the orchestra had dwindled, probably on account of Mr Breen’s illness. He suffered dreadfully from cancer before he died. I loved those rehearsals and often when we had finished Miss Llewelyn would just talk with us. I remember my schoolgirl awe of the poet Rupert Brooke. Miss Llewelyn had not only been at university with him, but had been a personal friend of his.}

Former student and later MGHS teacher, Ethel Mann\textsuperscript{55}

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\textsuperscript{52} Interview with Violet Jean Hayes (Wisbey), 12 April 2005.
\textsuperscript{53} Interview with Rose Porter, 10 October 2002.
\textsuperscript{54} Interview with Rose Porter, 10 October 2002.
\textsuperscript{55} Interview with Ethel Mann, 17 March 2001.
With the announcement of the relocation of MGHS to King Street West Melbourne, the King Street Elementary School committee and the Mothers’ Club, along with the school committees of the other North Melbourne schools, met with acting Director of Education James McRae and District Inspector J. C. Loughrey to discuss arrangements for the transfer of the incumbent pupils to nearby schools. They were worried about the move and there was concern that the children at the school were to be dispersed among other primary and elementary schools. Local councillors protested in the *Argus* that the King Street School was one of the best in Melbourne and thus should not be closed down. But when the fifty West Melbourne parents who attended the meeting learnt that, ‘with a few exceptions, no child would have to travel for more than half a mile to school’, their opposition to the proposals eased. The anticipated loss of King Street Elementary School traditions led to discussions about the continuation of local scholarships founded at the school, and McRae assured everyone that the Education Department would consider sympathetically any suggestions made by the trustee of these scholarships for their future continuance. To reconcile the King Street School committee to the loss of their premises the Education Department agreed to invite the nomination of two of its members to act on the girls’ school advisory council. Opposition to the move by the King Street School community was thus neatly circumvented.

While the King Street School community accepted the change in circumstances, the MGHS community actively resisted the move. A group of parents gathered on 21 April 1933 in the Manchester Unity Hall in Swanston Street Melbourne to voice their dissatisfaction. At the meeting, parents argued that the new site was unsuitable and inadequate for their daughters’ education, and a committee was organised to work with the school council to take up the fight for a more appropriate location.\(^{56}\)

Resistance to the move soon took on a political dimension as the influence of women’s groups was sought to change the government’s view that the girls required neither a location nor buildings as splendid and academically advantageous as the boys of MHS enjoyed. Archie Michaelis, MLA for St Kilda, addressed the annual general meeting of the powerful Australian Women’s National League, suggesting that the girls be moved with the boys as there was plenty of room, but this proposal was dismissed by the Minister of education, J. W. Pennington. Michaelis, whose daughter was a pupil at MGHS, argued that the proximity of the King Street School to the Flagstaff Gardens was awkward for a girls’

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\(^{56}\) *Argus*, 22 April 1933, p. 22.
school, as undesirable persons congregated there and the girls would be ‘open to the scrutiny of loafers’ hanging about the area. Tom Tunnecliffe, MLA for West Melbourne, whose daughter Mary had been head prefect at Government House, addressed the second annual meeting of the Mothers’ Club of the Lithgow Street State School, Abbotsford, on 29 April at the Collingwood Town Hall. The meeting was also attended by the President of the Victorian Federation of Mothers’ Clubs. Tunnecliffe criticised ‘ill-informed government decisions’ that led to schools being moved to unsuitable premises. He disagreed with Michaelis, however, that King Street with its proximity to the Flagstaff Gardens was undesirable. Rather than focusing on the protection of girls’ morals and their right to privacy, he argued that the real issue was simply the provision of facilities appropriate to delivering a good education, such as the boys at Forrest Hill enjoyed. Tunnecliffe exhorted the mothers to take up the issue and ‘make the Government sit up and take notice’.

Another problem with the King Street School site for MGHS parents and staff was the resemblance of its buildings to the condemned quarters at the old Spring Street site. After the inspiring grandeur of Government House, King Street must have seemed like a backward step, perhaps too sharp a reminder of the atrocious conditions the girls and staff had endured when the boys moved out, a further slap in the face for girls’ education. The classrooms at West Melbourne were badly lit, cramped, lacking in ventilation and uncomfortably cold in winter. The Chief Medical Inspector, Dr Jane Grieg, weighed into the debate, reporting the poor conditions to the Education Department and stressing that none of the classrooms conformed to the requirements of the 1911 Standards for School Buildings in Victoria. Under pressure following a meeting with a deputation of MGHS parents on 2 May, Pennington promised to attend to minor building and grounds issues, such as a decent fence, a common room and domestic arts facilities. Dr Ellen Balaam, one of the Continuation School’s most successful female achievers from the class of 1908, and a tireless member of the Palladians’ Association, pointed out to Pennington that the school ‘had more than justified its existence and that suitable arrangements should be made as

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57 Argus, 25 April 1933, p. 7. Michaelis’ sister, Alice, was a member of the AWNL and secretary of the National Council of Women (NCW) of Victoria.
58 Argus, 2 May 1933, p. 5.
59 Jane S. Greig (Chief Medical Inspector), ‘Report On Melbourne Girls’ High School’, Memorandum for the Acting Director of Education, 16 March 1933. Unit 12, MGHS Archive. See also Ruth Campbell & J. Barton Hack, ‘Greig, Jane Stocks (Jean) (1872–1939)’, in B. Nairn (ed), 1983, Australian Dictionary of Biography, Volume 9, Melbourne University Press, pp 101-102. Greig was an original member of both the Catalysts’ Society and the Lyceum Club, both clubs for intellectually-inclined women. It is significant that the poor condition of elementary schools did not provoke outrage until one of them was to be taken over by the state’s top girls’ high school. To that point, the poor conditions had been tolerated without protest or concern from the medical officer.
soon as possible for the girls’. The girls moved into King Street at the beginning of term two 1933, and the *Herald* reported optimistically on 13 May that the classrooms were bright and cheery and that they had been fitted with adequate blackboards and fireplaces. At the same time, the newspaper detailed the modern central heating plants that had been installed in newly built state schools, but not at MGHS. Older school buildings such as the West Melbourne premises, continued to rely on briquettes or wood for warmth.

Not all of MGHS’s traditions could be accommodated at King Street, and other sites were needed to allow the school to continue to function as it had in the past. Weekly school assemblies were held at the nearby North Melbourne Town Hall after the local markets had closed for business, and the regular trip to the town hall through the inner-suburban streets may have become an eagerly anticipated spectacle for the locals during the school’s stay. Rubina Gainfort, assistant principal in 1933, recalled that walking along the local paths required some ‘fancy footwork’: ‘the streets hadn’t been cleaned and the students and staff had to negotiate their way around rotting cabbage leaves’—waste from the nearby Victoria Market. Things were about to change, however.

The first assembly for 1934 was a memorable one for it was officially announced that as a result of the generosity of the chocolate manufacturer Sir Macpherson Robertson, a new school would be built for the girls at Albert Park. The work was due to commence in March that year and completion was expected in October. 1934 was a significant year as it was the centenary of Victoria’s establishment—first as a colony and then a state with federation in 1901. As part of the official celebrations, Captain Cook’s cottage was shipped from Yorkshire in England and rebuilt in the Fitzroy Gardens. The Women’s Centenary Council (chaired by women’s rights campaigner Alice Moss), established the Pioneer Women’s Memorial Garden and organised a book of remembrance (the Centenary Gift Book) containing records of some 1200 early settlers. The Shrine of Remembrance was completed in time for the Duke of Gloucester to open it. Sir Macpherson Robertson donated the £15,000 prize for the winner of the 1934 London to Melbourne centenary air

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60 Argus, 3 May 1933, p. 7.
61 Herald, 13 May 1933, p. 5.
63 Pallas, 1934.
64 Frances Fraser & Nettie Plamer (eds), 1934, *Centenary Gift Book*, Robertson & Mullens, Melbourne.
race (which drew many famous aviation pioneers as competitors and captured world-wide interest), and he also donated £40,000 to build a new state high school for Victorian girls. Construction began in March 1934 and was to be completed in time for the Duke of Gloucester’s state visit in November that same year. The opening of a new girls’ school amidst the widespread pomp and ceremony was itself a major occasion, just as the opening of the Melbourne Continuation School had been in 1905, although the haste with which it had been constructed was perhaps largely responsible for the numerous problems encountered soon after the school began to operate.

A question of identity

The change of name from Melbourne Girls’ High School to The Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School in 1934 was not universally welcomed. It was a condition of Sir Macpherson Robertson’s bequest that the school bear his name, but the decision was contested until the Minister of Education ended all dissent. Margery Robertson, former headmistress at the Melbourne Continuation School, tried to convince the Education Department, and the minister, to leave the school’s name as Melbourne Girls’ High School. In her position as secretary of the Palladians’ Association, she wrote to the Director of Education, James McRae, appealing the decision on behalf of former students. She argued that they would almost certainly regret a loss of identity and connection that might come with a change in the school’s name. Robertson linked this with the perpetuation of the Palladians tradition and the influential role of the association in the school. The Director of Education replied that there were precedents for changes of school name, as demonstrated in the successful renaming of the Emily MacPherson College of Domestic Economy and the G. H. Boyd Domestic College in South Melbourne. The reasons for changing these three school names were hardly analogous, however, for they had both dropped the ‘domestic arts’ label in an attempt to lift their prestige.

The Victorian Federation of Mothers’ Clubs joined the resistance to the renaming in February 1934. In a letter to the Minister of Education, the federation expressed the hope that the government would reconsider its decision, whilst recognising the magnitude of

67 Letter from James McRae, Director of Education, to Christina Montgomery, MGHS Archive, Unit 12.
Macpherson Robertson’s gift as well as his community spirit. The influential federation even applied subtle pressure to the public benefactor himself, hoping that Sir Macpherson Robertson might consent to having the new school hall named after him instead. It was all a waste of time. Melbourne Girls’ High School was to be renamed. This was the cost of the patronage and largesse of a man who, whilst undoubtedly extremely generous, was driven by an almost single-minded desire to be remembered by future generations of Melburnians.

The matter did not rest there, however. Former MGHS principal Christina Montgomery caused consternation within officialdom when she personally wrote to both Sir Macpherson Robertson and the Premier, Sir Stanley Argyle, months after the new school had opened, hoping to persuade them to agree to permit the school to revert to its previous name. When James McRae heard about the letters, he went into disaster control, writing to Sir Macpherson to assure him that the former headmistress had acted independently, and that the Department not only supported the school being named after its generous benefactor but that all official communications concerning the school had for some time referred to it as the Mac.Robertson Girls High School.

The matter lay in abeyance until 1954, when Rubina Gainfort wrote to the Chief Inspector of Secondary Schools requesting a change of name back to Melbourne Girls’ High School. Gainfort argued that the commonly used abbreviation (Mac.Rob) was not a suitable name for the school and that the former title could not be similarly mistreated. She also suggested that the commemorative tablet in the school building was adequate as a lasting monument to Sir Macpherson Robertson’s generosity. The only room for manoeuvre offered by the premier’s department to solve the problem was a suggestion that the name be changed to the Macpherson Robertson Girls’ High School if the school council agreed. The matter went no further.

Once the decision was made to build a permanent home for the girls a new headmistress was selected. Mary Hutton’s permanent appointment indicated that there was after all a future for an academic girls’ high school.

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68 Louisa M. Pitt, Secretary, Victorian Federation of Mothers’ Clubs, Letter to the Minister of Education, 22 February, 1934, MGHS Archive, Unit 12.
70 Rubina Gainfort, Letter to A. McDonell, Chief Inspector of Secondary Schools in Victoria, 21 April 1954, MGHS Archive, Unit 12.
Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School: A home at last

It is 1934, the year of Melbourne’s centenary...The Governor (has) moved back into “Buckingham Palace” and after a brief stint in a dilapidated old school in West Melbourne, we moved into Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School, a very new, very square, very ugly (compared to Government House) building, inevitably christened by the boys of Melbourne Boys’ High ‘the Chocolate Factory’.

Shirley Painter, The Bean Patch

Sir,

As the cold weather has arrived, I would ask that the school heating system be overhauled. Parts have been tied with string for some time and the engine needs a thorough overall.

Mary Hutton, headmistress, later principal

On 9 November 1934, on a temperate, late spring Wednesday afternoon, a specially selected group of girls arranged themselves into a formal guard of honour to await the arrival of the royal guests at the front entrance of the new school. With them stood the Premier of Victoria, Sir Stanley Argyle, leading the official reception committee. A rousing performance of the national anthem, God Save the King, announced the much anticipated arrival of the Duke of Gloucester. The royal party drove up to the entrance, where Olive Armour (later Weaver), the head prefect, presented the Duke with a blackwood cigar box incorporating a metal image of Pallas Athena, whose head was emblazoned on the school badge. Norman Seabrook, the architect who won the opportunity to draw up the plans for the school in a nationwide state government–sponsored competition in 1933, presented the Duke with a gold key to mark the occasion.

The opening ceremony was a momentous experience for the students. One student in attendance that day, Gwen Robinson (Swartz), recalls how, watching the teachers standing there, she marvelled at their dedication and status as single women. It was Olive Armour who really stuck in her mind, though. ‘I remember being full of admiration for this beautiful girl with the thick, blonde plaits as she gave a present to the Duke of Gloucester’.

72 M. Hutton, Letter to the Director of Education, 27 October 1941, MGHS Archive.
73 Greek iconography, the source of many of the school’s traditions from 1927 onward, is discussed in the following chapter.
74 Sydney Morning Herald, 8 November 1934 reported the opening ceremony as well as the Melbourne papers.
wrote Gwen in a letter almost seventy years later. ‘How I envied her position as head prefect, knowing I (a commercial student) had no hope of attaining such heights.’

The move to Albert Park, although an affirmative outcome for girls’ secondary education, soon presented an all too familiar set of problems. Perhaps the construction had been slapdash or the materials poor, but the building soon started to experience structural problems, with many of its fittings deteriorating quickly. After all the hyperbole that had accompanied the competition to find the best design for the building, the structural and maintenance problems that developed consumed a great deal of Mary Hutton’s time and energy. She found herself writing constantly to the Education Department and the Department of Public Works seeking ongoing maintenance and urgent repairs. Poor paintwork, intermittent heating, broken clocks, problems with the surface of the flat roof of the main building that made it unusable for physical education lessons, water-stained walls, peeling plaster and a broken hot water system were some of the continuing difficulties that had to be dealt with throughout the later 1930s.

In addition to trying to rectify the problems with the building, Mary Hutton found herself having to justify expenditure on basic services at the school. In March 1935, for example, she was contacted by the Education Department about an excessive electric light bill. She advised that the illumination of the school clock at night time, a practice visited on the school by Sir Macpherson Robertson when the clock tower was built, was the likely culprit. As if by magic, the practice was quickly discontinued.

Mary Hutton’s way of communicating with the department offers a window onto the experiences of a female secondary school principal in dealing with the education bureaucracy. She observed meticulously the traditional conventions of written communications, such as having ‘the honour to request’ permission for maintenance and repair work to be undertaken. Mountains of paperwork later, however, much of the work she requested to be carried out remained undone. Eventually she drew on her previous successful relationship with the Department as headmistress of the Collingwood Girls’ School and was effective in having her wishes considered in some matters. But the drain upon the public purse in the depressed 1930s was such that the needs of a recently constructed girls’ school were not a high priority.

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75 Letter from Gwen Robinson (Swartz) to author, 27 June 2005, MGHS Archive.
76 Inward Correspondence files, MGHS, VPRS 10249, Box 138.
77 The clock was to be restarted in February 2005 as part of the centenary of state secondary education celebrations, but it refused to start after the Victorian Premier, Steve Bracks, pressed the switch, to the amusement of all in attendance. It was repaired after the event.
A recurring issue for the school at Albert Park has been the problem of traffic noise. In 1941 this forced Miss Hutton to approach the Education Department yet again (Mary Hutton’s correspondence with the department was prolific in comparison to that of other headmistresses). Abutting Kings Way, an increasingly busy thoroughfare that led into the city centre, many classrooms were affected by incessant loud traffic noise—so much so that students and teachers could not hear one another speak. The chief architect from the Department of Public Works reported on 27 October 1941, after checking out the problem, that the overall condition of the buildings was quite poor and advised the staff to keep the windows closed to block out the worst of the noise. The teachers resisted, arguing that they preferred some noise to the unhealthy stuffiness that resulted from the lack of ventilation. Those who have experienced being in a closed classroom for an extended period of time with fifty or more human bodies would perhaps sympathise with the teachers’ position. The department advised in writing that a new system of sound-resisting windows had been developed but that the school should wait to see the results of this new system before outlaying the money to redress the problem. Not to be ignored, however, three independent-thinking students wrote to the Director of Education, Arnold Seitz, about the noise and cordially invited him to visit the school to hear it himself. Their letter resulted in a reprimand from the Chief Inspector of Secondary Schools, Julia Flynn, and a severe reprimand from Mary Hutton herself. Girls in the 1930s were expected to accept the wisdom of their elders rather than take matters into their own hands.\(^\text{78}\)

**War**

*To me the most regrettable result [of the takeover of the school premises] was the division of the school and the consequent transfer of all the third forms and some of the senior pupils to two other schools.*

Mary Hutton, 1942 \(^\text{79}\)

*There was no time to think of boyfriends as life was so shocked.*

Focus group of 1940s’ students \(^\text{80}\)

*People are being killed in France and we are worried about whether the brims of our hats are up or down.*

Wynne Higgins, student 1938–40 \(^\text{81}\)

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\(^{78}\) Inward Correspondence files, MGHS, VPRS 10249, Box 138.

\(^{79}\) M. Hutton, *Pallas*, June 1942, p. 3.

\(^{80}\) Focus Group, Canterbury 31 August 2003.
I went to Mac.Rob in 1943, just after the school had been derequisitioned, and although it was still a little shabby after the Americans had left, to my eyes it was the epitome of modern efficiency. Miss Hutton was the principal, she too a stickler for hats and gloves and manners, particularly about relinquishing one’s seat on the tram should there be one single adult [male or female] standing.

Pamela Neely (Smith) 82

Mac.Rob was on the move yet again in 1942 when the school buildings were handed over to the US army under the command of General Douglas MacArthur. Mary Hutton saw the move as yet another challenge and treated it philosophically.83 At assemblies and in Pallas in June that year she reminded the school community that both they and the nation might have been guilty of complacency for thinking that the war in which the British Empire was then engaged was one which ‘could not affect us personally’.84 Students and staff were relocated to three schools: Brighton Road, Mangarra Road at East Camberwell, and University High School. Some of the matriculation year professional class students recall, of all things, how geographically elevated they were at University High School. ‘We could see the world and we watched the Royal Melbourne Hospital being built’, reveals one group of former students, who also remarked on the poor condition of some areas of the school—‘We used to walk across to Melba Hall at the University of Melbourne for an assembly once a week. We saw graffiti on the school walls and the school was a bit knocked about’.85

The girls who went to Brighton Road from where Mary Hutton administered her school, a mixture of academic and commercial classes, were forced to share the premises with the incumbent kindergarten students.86 Outdoor activities were restricted, but Miss Knowles, the sports mistress, organised venues at Elsternwick Park and the Wimbledon Courts so that a sporting program could continue—quite a feat for one teacher in charge of a large

82 Pamela Neely (Smith), E-mail narrative, 2 December 2004.
83 Interestingly, Mac.Rob did not have the resources that Melbourne CEGGS was able to garner when that school also had to move premises—to seven different locations. The principal, Dorothy Ross, was able to ‘bargain with the officials for the assistance of Red Cross cars, the use of a special train, [and] three days to complete the move’. See Rosslyn McCarthy & Marjorie Theobald (eds), 1993, Melbourne Girls Grammar School Centenary Essays, 1893–1993, Hyland House, Melbourne, p. 113. See also Barbara Falk (with Cecile Trioli), 2000, D.J. Dorothy Ross, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.
84 M. Hutton, Principal’s Report, Pallas, June 1942, p. 3.
85 Focus Group Canterbury. 31 August 2003.
86 See Biddington, ‘Something to Fall Back On’, p. 108.
sporting program.\textsuperscript{87} This was a far cry from Joseph Hocking’s initial decision to cancel sporting activities at the Continuation School on the outbreak of the First World War out of respect for those fighting overseas.\textsuperscript{88} Such a decision was not repeated at the outbreak of war in 1939 because, by that time, the health of Victorian school students was a major concern of the Education Department.\textsuperscript{89} The idea of refraining from enjoyment and competition as a mark of loyalty and respect may not have been a consideration during World War II, but changing emphases did not diminish national loyalties. Mac.Rob embraced war work as a patriotic duty and privilege as passionately as it did when part of the co-educational MHS in 1914, and the school magazines of the war years describe the work in detail. Esme Burrows (Ellis) remembers that her father, who worked at General Motors Holden at the time, was asked to organise a concert for the ‘Catholic funds for the war effort’, and he ‘dobbed in’ Esme, an accomplished musician, to play a violin solo at the Princess Theatre.\textsuperscript{90}

War work helped to maintain a sense of unity between the three Mac.Rob groups spread across Melbourne and it enabled the school to continue its service to the local community, such service traditionally being part of the broader school curriculum. Mac.Rob girls raised over £1600 in War Savings & Loan contributions in 1942.\textsuperscript{91} Along with their teachers, they knitted and sewed for the troops and also collected eggs from the Victoria Market for patients in the Queen Victoria and Royal Women’s hospitals. Girls and staff even held knitting competitions to aid war funds and local kindergartens and charities.\textsuperscript{92}

The Mac.Rob girls’ efforts were not confined to supporting servicemen and women overseas; they supported the needs of the community on the home front as well. As many former students recall, their personal lives were affected by the war with fathers and brothers fighting overseas, and they knew what it was like for a woman alone to run a household close up, to ‘make do’. The school ‘vaccies’ (the evacuees), did enjoy the rare opportunities to come together as a whole school—at the annual speech night and the house swimming sports, for example. The swimming sports were held at the Richmond Baths in March 1942, and girls and staff streamed in (in an orderly fashion of course) from their temporary locations across Melbourne. The experience of house competition, heightened by

\textsuperscript{87} See Pallas 1942 for stories of the experience of separation.
\textsuperscript{88} Report of J. Hocking in Ours, 1914.
\textsuperscript{89} See Victorian Gazette and Teachers’ Aid throughout the period of the war, 1914–18.
\textsuperscript{90} Interview with Esme Burrows (Ellis), 9 October 2002.
\textsuperscript{91} M. Hutton, Principal’s Report, Pallas, June 1942, pp. 11–14.
\textsuperscript{92} M. Hutton, Principal’s Report, Pallas, June 1942, pp. 11–14.
passionate barracking, was exhilarating and, as recorded in *Pallas* that year, reinforced the memory and feeling of unity in the face of separation. The academic and commercial streams remained largely unaffected by the shift to Brighton Road, with classrooms adapted to accommodate subject requirements. Weekly school assemblies were held in nearby Holy Trinity Church at the invitation of the local minister, and final school assemblies in the larger Methodist hall. There were advantages to being there, according to former students, as both halls were a great deal larger than the one at Mac.Rob. The change was widely appreciated. There was, however, a significant disadvantage in having to move, as Margaret Hazeldine (Bertram) wrote in a letter describing her experiences at Brighton Road, for many girls’ health deteriorated as they ‘succumbed to the childhood illnesses left behind’. Despite the moves and war tasks, there was a continued emphasis on order and school work. According to a group of eleven former students, who have met regularly every year since 1942, Mac.Rob girls realised that they were a privileged group, there being few high schools for girls at the time and ‘few opportunities that education might have offered’. In the 1940s, according to these women, the girls’ world consisted of home, school, dances and church. There was no time to think of boyfriends. As one of the group reflected, life might have been quite different as a school girl if the world had not been at war.

**Home again in 1943**

*Sir, I have the honour to report that one stone of the parapet on the north-west corner has collapsed and other cracks have appeared. As there is the possibility of some cement falling and injuring a pupil, I would request that this be inspected.*

Mary Hutton in a letter to the Education Department, 1946

*The only thing relating to the war was that you couldn’t get all the items of school uniform you needed. I remember we couldn’t get the school uniform summer dress. Many of us wore plain navy with white collars and white cuffs. That was a pain because you had to take the collars off to wash them and sew them back on again. The striped school tie was another thing I remember we couldn’t get; we had to get plain green ties.*

Jessie Clark (Tilbrook)

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93 See *Pallas*, June 1942, p. 11.
95 Margaret Hazeldine (Bertram), Letter to author, 7 December 2004, MGHS Archive.
96 Focus Group, Canterbury, 31 August 2003.
97 Focus Group, Canterbury, 31 August 2003.
98 M. Hutton, Letter to the Director of Education, 18 March 1946, MGHS Archive. This problem was quickly redressed.
99 Interview with Jessie Clark (Tilbrook), 23 August 2002.
With the departure of the US Army in September 1942, the school faced an unexpected struggle to regain possession of the Albert Park site when the government allowed the RAAF to move in instead of returning the school to its community. Mary Hutton wrote to the Director of Education arguing simply that the staff and students should be able to return to the school. Her plea was supported by the Victorian Teachers’ Union, whose members lobbied politicians until the government conceded their demands. Hutton even wrote to the Prime Minister, John Curtin, calling on him to see that the school was returned to the purpose for which it was originally built—the education of girls. Hutton’s determination to reunite her school was even mentioned in the Bulletin, which stated that she should receive ‘first-class honours for the fight she has put up for her girls’. The headmistress, the article continued, ‘has pioneered the way and other school mistresses in need of a means of keeping the school corporate spirit up to concert pitch, can follow her example in asking for what they want’.

When staff and students returned to Mac.Rob at Albert Park, they discovered extensive alterations and damage to the buildings and equipment. Coming home was good but it was also a shock to see the premises as they had been left. The impressions and feelings of the girls as they returned to Albert Park were recorded in Pallas 1943, with one of the most poignant written by young Jean Cummins.

The asphalt court lies covered with clumps of tall weeds and huge trenches zigzag across the sportsground. An ‘Enquiries’ sign hangs from the junior cloakroom and two telephone boxes sit where drinking taps once stood. The school foyer, dark and gloomy, partitioned and silent, buffers the visitor against the sudden shock of seeing the vestiges of a service canteen where once the general office lay, bright Coca Cola posters declaring the American presence from the walls. A placard on Miss Hutton’s door announces the ‘Wing Commander’ and, of course, she has to bear that title in coming days. The bookstore walls are festooned with more posters, these depicting the various US army, navy and air force ranks. Most of the glass has been removed from the windows, so each room is dark and “sighs for the light and sun which used to pour through in days gone by”. Lights hang weirdly

100 Secretary of VTU to M. Hutton, 30 March 1942, MGHS Archive.
101 VPRS 10249, Unit 138. Letter to the Prime Minister, Canberra, 16 September 1942.
102 Bulletin, undated copy, MGHS Archive. Mary Hutton’s name was incorrectly given as Florence Hutton in the article.
suspended from ceiling to a few feet from the floor. The library has been partitioned into three offices, shutters have been fixed along the balcony and where once there had been broad green lawns now lie dust and dirt. New doors and openings dot the buildings and make it perfect to play hide and seek. We left that afternoon with feelings of despair and disappointment.\textsuperscript{103}

**Struggles continue: Traffic noise**

Mac.Rob was fortunate in retrospect, as the state government in 1942 allocated sufficient funds to allow only a minority of schools taken over for war purposes to resume their original function. Others had to wait. In the meantime, Mary Hutton directed her energies to ensuring that school spirit and traditions remained strong in the wake of the evacuation once the school community was reunited. These were testing times for other reasons too. The problem of traffic noise recurred, greatly exacerbated by the Australian Army’s decision to conduct regular tank exercises along the access road in front of the school. Sometimes these noises, however, were distracting for other reasons, according to Thelma Ricardo writing of her wartime schooldays in 1982. As Thelma recalls, there was a day in 1943 when the girls working in room 105 heard a ‘dreadful noise of traffic’ that proved to be a ‘convoy of soldiers going past in tanks. We had rushed to the windows and were waving’, she writes, ‘when the teacher said, “Girls! Girls! Remember who you are. I do not want any of your common everyday manners!”’\textsuperscript{104}

**Building defects**

Structural problems that appeared before the war continued to be a problem with the girls’ return, some of them reminiscent of those experienced back in the 1920s when MGHS was at Spring Street. Mary Hutton resumed her letters to the Department on 18 March 1946. This seems to have been her lot during her tenure as principal, if the substantial amount of paperwork between herself and the Department is any indication.\textsuperscript{105} Perhaps this explains in part why some former students cannot recall her presence in their everyday lives at school. Occupied with pressing administrative matters, Hutton relied on her deputy, Rubina Gainfort, to be the visible sign of authority around the school. Consolidation was the principal’s priority. She focussed her main energies on bringing the buildings and facilities

\textsuperscript{103} Jean McLean (Cummins), *Pallas*, July 1943, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{104} Written memoir of Thelma Ricardo, 13 October 1982.
\textsuperscript{105} Hutton’s extensive correspondence is available in the MGHS Archive.
to a decent standard and maintaining the scholarly achievement and tone crucial to the school’s reputation for academic excellence and cultivation of liberal-democratic values. Applications for enrolment at Mac.Rob exceeded the number of places available in the post-war years but new high schools were being mooted within government circles. Would this have an effect on Mac.Rob’s enrolments or position within the Victorian education landscape? Lyndsay Gardiner, in her 1977 history of Tintern CEGGS, explains how economic and social change in the years following the war affected girls’ education in Victoria:

The days following the war were different. This was, for most Australians, a time of prosperity. Money was available. Many families moving out to new residential suburbs did not fancy the stark, shoestring, new high schools for their daughters.106

Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School represented an alternative model, however, as families who could not afford a private school for a daughter, particularly if they already had sons attending private schools, saw Mac.Rob as another possibility. Families even began to move into areas where central schools (feeder schools for Mac.Rob and MHS) were located to ensure entry for their daughters.

The three per cent rule

In the 1973 Victorian state elections the Labor Party candidate for Prahran declared that if the ALP won office, Melbourne High School (and by association, Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School) would cease to exist as a select entry school.

J.F.A. Inch107

For many years it has been the view of the Australian Labor Party (ALP), that single-sex schools should be phased out as quickly as possible, and that all single-sex schools should be open to students in the immediate area rather than be subject to any special entrance requirement.

Robert Fordham, ALP shadow Minister of Education, 1975108

106 Gardiner, Tintern School and Anglican Girls' Education, p.110.
108 Robert Fordham (Shadow Minster of Education) in a reply to a letter from Mac.Robertson Girls' High School Council (President Tom Warr), explaining ALP policy regarding Mac.Rob, 1 August 1975, MGHS Archive.
Mac.Rob was not immune from the effects of the radicalism and outspokenness of the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s. Charges of elitism were levelled at it because of its selective entry principle, with bitter calls for its closure coming from other state high school principals and some state politicians. Some principals believed that Mac.Rob, MHS and University High School were engaging in the ‘discriminatory practice’ of skimming off the cream of their students, resulting in the creation of academically elite state high schools. They wanted the practice stopped. According to former Mac.Rob teacher, Sandra Kantanis, the principals of the three schools targeted appealed to the Victorian Principals’ Association, assuring them that the selective-entry high schools would not disadvantage the other high schools by causing a mass exodus of their brightest students. In 1968, the Minister of Education, John Rossiter, a former MHS student, decided in consultation with the selective-entry school principals that Mac.Rob and MHS would draw their students from the suburbs south of the Yarra River. In 1970, the minister introduced the ‘three per cent rule’, which fixed a maximum number of year eight students from any one of the feeder schools permitted to sit the entrance examination to Mac.Rob and MHS, with only three per cent of eligible students to be accepted by the two high schools combined.

Attacks on Mac.Rob’s selective nature continued into the 1970s and 1980s, according to former principals Gwen Bowles (1972–1984) and Gabrielle Blood (1985–1996). The animosity at principals’ meetings must have been palpable as the Mac.Rob and MHS principals faced accusations that they were draining other schools of their talent. Gwen Bowles argues that she saw the situation quite differently from her counterparts: ‘We didn’t get them from the schools that were really performing. Those girls did not want to do the travelling. We were only getting students from schools where they were not having a fair go’. What might not have been appreciated by the other school principals, though it has been pointed out by many former students as well as Bowles, was that some girls who were unhappy at their schools saw Mac.Rob as an opportunity for self-fulfilment. This issue is discussed further in the final chapter as it illustrates one of the prime reason former students give for seeking entry to Mac.Rob. That said, not all girls who were successful at getting into Mac.Rob took up their places, for some won and accepted scholarships to private schools.

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111 Inch, *Honour the Work*, p. 91.
112 Interview with Gwen Bowles, 26 September 2003.
The issue of getting into Mac.Rob was, in Gwen Bowles’ experience, a fraught one. In the past, a principal might have used her discretion to accept a girl under special circumstances, thus bypassing official entry guidelines. Doing this, however, left Mac.Rob open to public criticism and attacks of elitism, until Bowles made it clear that the Department’s guidelines for entry would prevail in all cases. With only 30 per cent of enrolments now coming from the central school system (until its demise in the 1980s), and the remainder of students having to sit an entrance examination, entry assumed an increasingly competitive aspect. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, however, the rule was regularly circumvented, as the central schools (except Moonee Ponds Central) worked on the principle of recommendation, and there is evidence that some central school principals recommended students to Mac.Rob for reasons other than academic ability and potential. Mac.Rob’s existence was threatened again in August 1975, when the shadow Minister of Education, Robert Fordham (ALP), advised the president of MGHS School Council, Tom Warr, of the official Australian Labor Party policy that single-sex schools should be phased out along with the selective practice of special entry provision.\(^{113}\) The influence of the women’s movement was also significant at this time, with women pushing for more democratic schooling initiatives. Robert Fordham made it clear that all state high schools would be open to students in the school neighbourhood, and if Mac.Rob remained open under a Labor government it would become another comprehensive state high school.

It was not until June 1985 that the ‘three per cent’ policy was renegotiated and modified, with all schools instructed to meet the terms of the policy’s provisions. J. F. Dunstan, Executive Director (Schools), met with the principals of Mac.Rob and MHS, along with representatives of the Victorian High Schools Principals’ Association and the Victorian Secondary Teachers’ Association, to work out arrangements for entry to the selective schools. The idea was that the principals of such schools would take responsibility for the selection process, thus limiting the involvement of the principals of Victorian high schools in general. The central school principals argued, however, that they should continue the policy of recommendation until the last of their 1985 intake had finished form two (year eight), to be fair on those students.\(^{114}\) According to former principal Gabrielle Blood, approximately one third of students came from the central schools until at least 1989, but the calibre of those students varied enormously because of the arbitrary and subjective practice of recommendation.\(^{115}\) This meant that special provision had to be made for some

\(^{113}\) Robert Fordham to T.G. Warr, 8 August, 1975, MGHS Archive.

\(^{114}\) Kantanis, ‘An Idiosyncratic Policy in Victorian State Education’.

\(^{115}\) Interview with Gabrielle Blood, 1 & 8 September 2003.
to improve their performance in order to make their experience at Mac.Rob at least passable, an issue discussed further in chapter four. Sandra Kantanis also argues that many academically gifted girls who got into Mac.Rob did not remain because they were unprepared for the pressures of the academic curriculum, and their parents had unrealistic expectations of the academic success they might achieve there. Some parents, Kantanis concludes insightfully, thought that their daughters would be successful at Mac.Rob just because they had been accepted there.\(^\text{116}\)

On 12 April 1995, Geoffrey Spring, Director of School Education, sent a memorandum to all secondary college principals in Victoria advising them that the ‘three per cent’ rule would be retained for at least ninety-five per cent of the intake at Mac.Rob.\(^\text{117}\) In addition, a discretionary category of ten places was introduced to deal with anomalies in meeting the needs of students in particular circumstances. Into the twenty-first century, the principal retains this discretion, but prospective students still need to come close to the overall requirements for selective entry. Otherwise, the concerns Kantanis expressed—that girls (and parents) who have not been well-prepared for the pressures and rigour of the academic curriculum at Mac.Rob, and the pressures of competition produced by the existing system of examinations, may founder—may have substance.\(^\text{118}\)

The Melbourne Formula 1 Grand Prix

*For the school community, the Grand Prix represents a loss of control over significant areas of school environment and the constant need to respond continually to the often unforeseen agendas and actions of persons or groups (including the media) external to the school.*

Former principal, Gabrielle Blood\(^\text{119}\)

In 1996 the Australian Formula 1 Grand Prix was held at Albert Park for the first time. Two years of negotiation preceded this event amid passionate and often violent public controversy. The Mac.Rob school community was not a homogeneous group on the Grand Prix issue, with some in favour of the event and others against it because of the effect it

\(^{118}\) All students now have to sit the entrance examination regardless of the year level entry being sought. Competition for places is so strong.
might have on both the local environment and the school. Once again, attention was drawn to the school’s location within the park, a position that then principal Gabrielle Blood noted as particularly sensitive. According to her, the school council resolved ‘to take all action necessary to minimise the possible adverse effects of the event on the school and its operations’. Planning and negotiations with the Grand Prix Corporation began almost two years prior to the actual event, and it required the combined efforts of the staff, students, parents and Palladians to prepare for it, often working in the dark in relation to specifics of the event organisation. As Gabrielle Blood explains,

The element of the “unknown” remained present right until the conclusion of the event, including the concluding concert. The anticipation of and strategic planning to meet the “unknown” increased the stress and time (workload) for many members of the school community. In a bid to work within the constraints of the event, the school administration instituted plans to enable the school to continue to function throughout the Grand Prix week. The normal school program was modified for the actual race days, with the swimming sports to be held at the Prahran swimming pool, and one pupil-free day was allotted for staff professional development.

Access to the school stands out as a major constraint faced by the school community (and anyone needing to do business with it) during the week of the Grand Prix season in Melbourne. The experience has been likened to that of being in a concentration camp where one is cut off from the rest of the world with no access, by road or from within the park, for an entire week. A massive bevy of security guards enforces the restricted access rule. In 1996 Gabrielle Blood and her assistant principal found themselves ‘locked in’ after the keys to one of the two sets of gates blocking access to the school were lost, and some teachers attempting to enter the school had the intimidating experience of having their staff passes scrutinised uncomfortably closely by security guards. One staff member was injured in 1996, suffering a broken arm and ankle injuries after a fall where a cyclone fence had been erected. Dirt and dust whipped up by the Grand Prix workers and the cars were, and continue to be, another consequence of the big event. As the cleaners could not

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gain access to the gymnasium used by the school for physical education (PE) classes, the PE program was disrupted, training sessions for various sports could not be held, and the school was unable to host visiting schools in its weekly sports program.\textsuperscript{124}

Noise levels once again became an issue for the Mac.Rob community, as was the case in the 1930s and 1940s. This time it was the din of jets and helicopters in addition to the everyday Kings Way traffic noise, plus the screams of the racing cars on race days, making a normal school program impossible. Nevertheless, explains a proud Miss Blood, some of the administration staff in her time continued to work in the main office amidst, and in spite of, the noise and excitement, protests and lock-outs.\textsuperscript{125} A 1996 report on the Grand Prix experience compiled for Mac.Rob’s school council concluded that, ‘The conduct of the Grand Prix within Albert Park was and still remains anathema to many members of our school community’.\textsuperscript{126} Acknowledging that there were some who regarded it more positively, and that, in retrospect, many of the school’s initial fears concerning the possible effects the race might have on the school had not been realised, the report nevertheless identified the level of disruption to the school on a daily basis as an ongoing concern. As Gabrielle Blood put it:

> From my own point of view, I would sum this up as a loss of control over significant aspects of school environment and the consequent need to respond continually to the often unforeseen agendas and actions of persons or groups (including the media) external to the school. I would hope that the experience of 1996 will help alleviate this problem in the future.\textsuperscript{127}

This chapter has traced some of the causes and courses of threats to Mac.Rob’s existence since 1905, and other significant challenges. The theme—sites, struggles and survival—represents an important aspect of this school history because these events and experiences are those often loom largest in the memories of past students and staff. Furthermore, access to primary documents, including communications between protagonists, as well as comprehensive reports relating to those experiences, has allowed rich contextualisation of the women’s memories. This approach offers useful insights into what was important for the women of Mac.Rob, students and staff, and what it meant to be Mac.Rob women as

they faced each challenge. The following two chapters draw on this approach as well. As explained in the introduction, the girls are the prime focus of this history, but to build a coherent picture of what it has been like to be a girl at Mac.Rob from 1905, the perspective of the women who headed Mac.Rob is vital in illuminating that picture. The girls did not exist in a vacuum.

As mentioned in chapter two, with the glimpses into Joseph Hocking and Margery Robertson’s headships, the heads strove very hard to set the tone of the school. They brought with them expectations and beliefs about education, women, men, children, work and success, and these had significant ramifications for the students. The following two chapters thus reveal the experiences and perspectives of the women who led Mac.Rob. Their inclusion will offer a sense of balance to the girls’ interpretations and memories of their schooling experiences and provide a rich context in which to view those experiences. Headmistresses and principals are sometimes regarded as isolated and largely invisible figures in girls’ memories of their school years, but the many interviews and written memoirs this history draws on suggest another reading of Mac.Rob’s past.
Chapter Four

Inventing tradition and making histories

The pattern was set by Melbourne High School, opened in 1905 and known as the Melbourne Continuation School until 1912. Its headmaster was Joseph Hocking, determined to match the public schools in examination performance and character formation. He used rituals and school songs of a public school nature, a prefect system and sport in the inculcation of character.

Martin Crotty 2001

Have we adopted and upheld the best traditions from the wealth handed down to us from the old Melbourne High School and are we steadily forming new ones particularly suited to our girls?

Christina Montgomery 1928

[Mac.Rob’s] ethos was so old fashioned that it was feminist. No matter what we did, it must be done to the best of our ability.

Beatrice Faust (Fennessy), 1950s student

The Greek traditions don’t mean much to a girl whose family came from China, but I respect them.

2004 student on a number 96 Melbourne tram

When state secondary schooling was finally established in Australia in the early twentieth century, it was the public schools which provided the models for the curriculum, school organisation and methods, and for practices such as prefects, school badges, school songs, and sports.

R.J.W. Selleck, B.K. Hyams and E.M. Campbell

2 C. Montgomery, Pallas, December 1928, p. 4.
When Melbourne High School (MHS) was divided into two single-sex schools in 1927, each school had the opportunity to reinvent itself and carve out its own culture and traditions. While the boys’ school had a long history of English public school culture upon which to draw, Christina Montgomery must have been quietly delighted when she found herself in the position of being able to draw on her own source of inspiration: the history and mythology of Greek and Roman civilisation. A passionate Classics scholar, the headmistress found in Greek and Roman literature the archetypes of womanhood whose qualities, characters and deeds would endure as the inspiration for the girls of Melbourne Girls’ High School (MGHS), and, later, Mac.Rob. In her selection of candidates for the school badge, the school houses and the motto, Christina Montgomery feminised the English public school traditions, and drew on a long tradition of girls’ academic schools in order to recast the identity of Victoria’s first academic state high school for girls.

The choice of classical symbolism was significant in the context of the late 1920s, for the world had changed dramatically in the years leading up to the division of MHS in 1927. In the aftermath of the 1914–18 Great War, with its massive death and destruction, much of what had gone before, particularly in the world of symbols, was rejected. The writings of Robert Graves (The Long Weekend for example), illustrates this, while Paul Fussell analyses that transformation in The Great War and Modern Memory. Historically, people tend to look to the more immediate past for models in shaping or constructing identity in the present, but the trend in the twenties was either to hark back to the distant classical (Athenian) past, the roots of western culture, or to turn to modernist iconoclasm and futurism. Christina Montgomery’s reverence for the classical past ensured her choice of Athenian models to help shape the present and future of her school, particularly its students. Within that heritage, she believed, lay everything the world of the late 1920s needed to reinvent itself as virtuous and cultivated.

The selection of Minerva, the goddess of wisdom and daughter of Jupiter, reflected Montgomery’s views on, and hopes for, women. To her, Minerva (the Roman equivalent of Pallas Athena) embodied womanhood—the warrior, strong and wise, inspiring courage, self-

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7 Montgomery’s reports and articles in the school magazine, Pallas, illustrate her love of and belief in the efficacy of the values and ethos of the classical past, of Greek mythology, for the modern woman.
discipline and determination. As the defender of the home and the state, and the embodiment of wisdom, purity and reason, fearless but never aggressive, Minerva demonstrated what was possible for women. As patron of the arts, handicrafts and trade, Minerva’s example could inspire even more widely. To the headmistress (who had initially considered the sphinx as a possible badge but discarded it because it had claws), Minerva was the perfect model for the students of Victoria’s first girls’ academic state high school.8

**New women?**

Not long after the introduction of the new badge, Ennis Honey (O’Callaghan) wrote about it in her autobiographical *Nymphs and Goddesses*, explaining her interpretation of its symbolism as a well-educated girl from an impoverished family on the brink of becoming an independent woman in the 1930s. Her headmistress would have been proud of Ennis’s appreciation of the symbolism:

> The wise, brave, strong Athena, the equal of men, the independent achieving Artemis, the archer with unswerving aim—they were archetypes for the women [Miss Montgomery] wished her girls to become. We should be the new women, educated, clear-thinking, noble, just. We must pass on our own ideals to the next generation and use our education and talents to improve the lot of those less privileged and, especially, women.9

Under the leadership of Christina Montgomery, MGHS embraced and incorporated traditions consistent with its academic and non-academic aims. The privilege of a good education was, in many ways, the handmaiden of leadership in that a girl who was fortunate enough to receive such an education had an obligation to use it to improve herself and society. Privilege, then, brought with it the challenge of social responsibility for both students and staff. Former students recall constant reminders that they were privileged to be receiving such an excellent education—that they, in turn, had a responsibility not to ignore that privilege by wasting their education. New rules were established along with new daily practices and routines, and a new house system. A new school song was composed, a motto.

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8 See C. Montgomery, Principal’s Report, *Pallas*, 1932 explaining her choices following the splintering of MHS.
selected and a new school banner crafted with, as Ennis Honey describes it, an ‘exquisitely embroidered head of Athena’. ¹⁰

Montgomery also continued the tradition of a school magazine and *Pallas* was born—it quickly became an important arena for sharing ideas and for communication between the school and the home. The annual speech night, where the girls appeared in virginal white dresses to celebrate and acknowledge achievement and affirm their identity and reputation, also continued. The weekly clubs (which varied over subsequent decades according to interest, relevance and viability) included the literary and Classical clubs, French club, Red Cross and arts and crafts clubs: all cultural and humanitarian pursuits reflected the Greek goddess Athena’s attributes. *Pallas* recorded the girls’ activities and provided an important forum in which to share their experiences and interpretations of school traditions and culture.

The recasting of symbols and tradition within Greek mythology has evoked responses among former students ranging from passionate embrace to ambivalence. Some students express feelings of remoteness from classical (and western¹¹) symbolism, judging those symbols and meanings as irrelevant to them in contemporary society. Lilian Efron, however, a girl from a Jewish family fleeing Nazi oppression in pre-war Europe of the later 1930s, remembers having nothing with which to compare Mac.Rob tradition as a student in the post-war period. ‘Nevertheless, I totally accepted it’, she explains, ‘as did most students of that era’.¹² Judith Buckrich, a student in the 1960s, remembers feeling a strong connection to the Greek traditions and found them highly appealing. She thought that it was wonderful to have Pallas Athena, the goddess of war and wind, as a model for the Mac.Rob girls. Although Judith is unsure just how much her own peers in general were aware of the meaning and significance of the Greek symbols, she recalls how much she herself knew, and that she loved it all. She also remembers that her father was equally impressed with Mac.Rob traditions: ‘[He] thought it was wonderful that I was at this school that worshipped this fantastic kind of [woman]—Pallas Athena; you couldn’t get much better than that’.¹³ Not everyone accepted or was comfortable with a new identity, however, and perhaps some found it hard to recast themselves as ‘Athena’s daughters’. One student, reflecting on her time at MHS decades after leaving school, felt that she belonged to a very different high school, one with a

¹⁰ Honey, *Nymphs and Goddesses*, p. 102. See Appendices 6 and 7 for the school songs.
¹¹ The current student population includes a majority of students from non–western backgrounds.
¹² Interview with Lilian Efron, 11 September, 2002.
¹³ Interview with Judith Buckrich, 12 October 2003.
different name, different rules, uniform, badge and school song. In relation to the girls’ high school then and later on, she always felt like a foreigner. Her school was Melbourne High (MHS 1912–1927) whose traditions had continued on from the Continuation School when its name changed in 1912, and she was a MHS girl. To her, the outward signs of her school defined it, and the subsequent changes created a splintering in identity that she was unable to resolve.\(^4\) Perhaps too the change from a co-educational to a single-sex school played some part in feeling no attachment to the new girls’ school. Jean Catford, a MHS girl who spent her only year there at The Branch (an early school extension housed in the Victorian Agricultural Society Building in Victoria Parade) also believed that MGHS was an entirely new school, separate from, and different from, the school she had attended. For Jean there were no continuities, no similarities between MHS and MGHS.\(^5\) Linda Cuthill (Pump) felt the same way. A student in the 1920s, Linda ‘felt like a foreigner’ with all the changes to the symbols of MHS; as a consequence of changes to the symbols and traditions they had known and understood, she and her group decided to stick to their identity as MHS students and chose not to join the Palladians, ‘with apologies’.\(^6\)

Having cast a quick glance over changes brought about by the splintering of the co-educational MHS it is useful to examine briefly some of the more visible and familiar aspects of tradition at MGHS since 1927 and assess how they have been understood by students across the decades. What did the girls think about the motto, for example; what did it mean to them at school and later on throughout their lives? Did students value their school’s traditions? What about those who clashed with tradition and the messages, overt and subtle, it was meant to impart? These are important questions as the meaning a girl made of the school motto may reveal, at least in part, the meaning she made of being at the school itself.

**The motto—potens sui (self mastery, self control)**\(^7\)

*We used to say ‘potato suet’.*

Maisie Comerford, 1920s student\(^8\)

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\(^4\) *Palladians Newsletter, (PN),* August 1994, p. 4.  
\(^5\) Interview with Jean Catford, 11 March 2003.  
\(^6\) Linda Cuthill (Pump), *PN, August 1994,* p. 4.  
\(^7\) 3rd *Book of Horace,* Ode 29.  
\(^8\) Maisie Comerford, Private letter, 14 January 1991, MGHS archive.
I think the motto was imparted very early by the principal at general assemblies—how they expected you to behave. But then we were used to that sort of thing, this improving of a person’s character, which was part of being at school.

Robin Wren (Barker), 1955–56

The purpose of a school motto is to instil tradition and common values whilst inspiring students in the living of their lives at school and beyond. According to former Mac.Rob principal, Lesley Boston (1996–2004), these things teach girls how to live within a community and encourage them to follow what it is they desire to be. A community with common values and shared traditions, Lesley insists, creates a secure space for a girl to feel comfortable with her own identity and even to become aware of her potential: ‘Every community needs a few boundaries; less is better and self-discipline is important. If you can encourage self-discipline, then the less is better idea becomes possible and is construed as more freedom, and there are offshoots and advantages from this situation’. The following story of two former students meeting in a hectic crush in London’s underground rail network suggests that the Mac.Rob motto remains a powerful maxim in the post-school years, for some women at least. Ruth, a Mac.Rob student from 1965 travelled overseas in 1973. In the London underground during peak hour one Friday evening she was one of a mass of passengers who surged forward to enter a lift that would take them up to street level. According to Ruth, as the passengers tried to squeeze inside the lift to allow the door to close, she heard a voice softly say, potens sui and she replied, ‘self control’. Two strangers were united as former Mac.Rob students. There are similar stories that illustrate how strongly former students identify with their old school, not just because they had a motto drummed into them but because of the centrality, even comfort, of this legacy of schooling in their lives beyond school. And yet, some former students would feel quite embarrassed at Ruth’s story because the motto and other school traditions have different meanings for them. What happens then, at school and beyond, to transform two words into a tool for life for some former students, and what of those who are not similarly influenced and inspired by their experience and memories of potens sui?

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19 Interview with Robin Wren (Barker), 20 February 2005.
20 Interview with Lesley Boston, 6 September 2004.
21 Interview with Lesley Boston, 6 September 2004.
22 Ruth Johnston, E-mail narrative, 23 February 2003.
Originally, three possible mottos were proposed following the division of MHS: *Non Sine Gloria* (not without glory), *Sine Moribus Frustra* (without character all is vain) and *Potens Sui* (master of oneself or, equally, self control). These were submitted to Martin Hansen, Chief Inspector of Secondary Schools, a man who, as suggested in the previous chapter, had little appreciation of the extent of girls’ and women’s educational aspirations and doggedly prioritised boys’ education over that of girls. Hansen selected *potens sui* as the motto for the new girls’ high school. In all likelihood, Christina Montgomery understood the motto’s meaning and implications very differently from Martin Hansen, and she announced publicly that she was ‘thrilled with the choice’. She told her students and the wider readership in the 1930 edition of *Pallas* that, ‘The badge and its motto require some living up to, and I trust that in years to come potens sui will be a magic phrase that will be an open sesame to friendships and understanding all over the world’.23 There is a story about the motto told by the headmistress that illustrates its importance to her and how she interpreted and explained its meaning for a woman in 1928. According to Montgomery, an officer in the Education Department told her that he did not like *potens sui*. When asked what was wrong with it he replied that it might mean ‘master of him’. ‘Potens sui’, responded the diminutive, self-assured headmistress, ‘can only mean self control—master of oneself. But I think a girl who is master of herself is very likely to be master of him’.24 This is certainly true for some of the women interviewed for this thesis who recall drawing on the motto on numerous occasions to help them through potentially difficult situations; from maintaining calm and dignity to mustering courage and resilience, potens sui has been whispered and said by many a former student in moments of crisis or stress. For Jessie Clark (Tilbrook), the motto had, and continues to have, real meaning—it ‘wasn’t just something that was stuck on a student’s badge or blazer pocket’.25 Jean Ayres (Fenton) agrees, acknowledging that the motto has lived with her throughout the seventy or so years since she left school, often helping her to cope in difficult times.26 Former students from the 1980s and 1990s also mention at school reunions that the motto was internalised by them, so much so that they ‘whisper it under their breaths, or quietly think it’, in potentially challenging situations.27 These women maintain that, in their experience, the motto, with its explicit and personal meaning for them, is empowering in ordinary life. Others, however, have found this constant association with the motto a somewhat not always welcome pressure in life after school.

24 Speech made by Christina Montgomery on the occasion of the unveiling of her portrait following her retirement, MGHS Archive.
25 Interview with Jessie Clark (Tilbrook), 23 August 2003.
26 Interview with Jean Ayres (Fenton), 4 March 2003.
27 Conversations with former students at school reunions during 2003. Record in author’s personal journal.
A group of students from the 1940s, who acted as a focus group for this school history, could not recall the meaning of the motto ever being made explicit to them publicly.\textsuperscript{28} Perhaps their principal, Mary Hutton, thought that it was self-evident. Nevertheless, most former students hold that the motto was stressed all the time, and its message remains important and constant. ‘For many’, the group agrees, ‘it has helped shape their attitudes and, in many cases, their lives’.\textsuperscript{29} Potens sui has not been so enthusiastically embraced by every former student, however; nor has it been as effective and influential in the living of life for some women as it has been for others. Wynne Higgins, a practical, energetic and artistic woman who attended Mac.Rob in 1938, wished that the girls’ school had held on to ‘Honour the Work’ the original motto from 1905 and the one retained by the boys’ school after the 1927 splitting of MHS: a ‘far more sensible motto’ in Wynne’s opinion.\textsuperscript{30} The problem with potens sui, according to Wynne Higgins, is that its subtle negative message can be limiting or even disappointing—it can contribute to self-doubt and can be a constraint on one’s creative impulses or even imply a lack of sanity. ‘If you don’t have or acquire self control’, the former student spells out, ‘then by implication, a girl is mad’.\textsuperscript{31} Whereas Wynne focuses on the role of cultural differences in girls’ understandings of school traditions and how they translate them, and their nuances, into everyday life, Jessie Baker maintains that the motto’s meaning was not the problem for her. More accurately, it was the challenge the motto presented as a guide to living life beyond school, as self control, although important, did not come easily to her.\textsuperscript{32} Forty years after Jessie’s school days were over, a former student from the early 1990s reveals the surprise she felt when she first encountered the motto at Mac.Rob. To Ruth, as a new girl in year nine, the motto’s meaning was also charged with unexpectedly negative messages. Ruth expected a motto with a ‘far more inspirational meaning’, but, in retrospect, twelve years down the track, she has come to regard it as empowering rather than restrictive. ‘Think about what a girl can achieve if she is self-disciplined and in control of herself’, she declares. ‘She is free to be herself rather than a reflection of that part of society that dictates what a girl should be like.’\textsuperscript{33}

For some, the fact that the motto and its message were drummed into them constantly by principals and teachers made it seem mundane and prescriptive. Conversely, Suzanne Russell (Westcott), believed that the message and meaning of the motto, and other school

\textsuperscript{28} Focus Group held at Canterbury, 31 August 2003.
\textsuperscript{29} Focus Group, Canterbury, 31 August 2003.
\textsuperscript{30} Interview with Wynne Higgins, 28 August 2003.
\textsuperscript{31} Interview with Wynne Higgins, 28 August 2003.
\textsuperscript{32} Interview with Jessie Baker, 22 February 2005.
\textsuperscript{33} Interview with Ruth Ward, 4 March 2005.
traditions, were not imposed from above—from the principals and staff—even though traditions, and the keeping up of them, were constantly mentioned throughout her time at Mac.Rob. ‘The meaning came from the girls’, according to Suzanne, ‘and this was passed on from year to year’, this filtering and mediating process giving the motto ‘a more liberal and democratic essence’.34

The meaning of the motto has not always been clear or convincing to every girl who has passed through the school. Some former students, for example, have found it remote because of cultural and ethnic differences. In February 2005, a group of Mac.Rob girls gathered at Zaletti’s restaurant in Queen Victoria Square, Melbourne, to enjoy a coffee before making their way to the Melbourne Town Hall for the celebration of the centenary of state education. When approached to discuss aspects of the school history, the girls, who were of South–East and South Asian background, deliberated about the motto and its meaning and significance for them. Each agreed that it had little relevance for them culturally, ‘although it makes sense to practise self control’, remarked one of them. ‘We don’t really know about the goddess stuff because it’s not part of our culture, but we respect it’, added another.35 The meaning of the motto, then, is not the same for all students either culturally or historically.

The school assembly

[Some girls] dismissed Miss Montgomery’s orations as high-falutin’ or cuckoo or dingbats, though, like the rest of us, they were glad to participate in her enriching applications of these ideas to our school life.

Ennis Honey, Nymphs and Goddesses

Our principal, Miss Barrett, spoke in school assemblies about the value of good manners, proper dress and hard work at all times.

Former teacher, Judith Walsh

I remember, in year 12, listening to Helen Garner speak at one school assembly. She told us that things would go wrong in our lives, that they would not run to plan. I remember that we laughed. I remember thinking that we were Mac.Rob girls, we were intelligent, we were going to take on the world…Would we have listened way back then [in 1986] that things other than our careers were worthy of our consideration?

Debbie Hedger, Athena, 2003

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34 Interview with Suzanne Russell (Westcott), 20 April 2004.
35 Record of discussion, P. Parker’s journal, 15 February 2005.
36 Honey, Nymphs and Goddesses, p. 102.
37 Interview with Judith Walsh, 25 July 2002.
Besides the motto, the most significant forums for the dissemination and practice of tradition at Mac.Rob have been the school assembly and the annual speech night. Regular assemblies have been, and continue to be, times to come together as a school community, to affirm and to be affirmed in what the school has stood for in the past and stands for in the present. This was equally important during the World War II years when the school was dispersed to three different locations. With the establishment of MGHS in 1927, Christina Montgomery continued the tradition of inviting guest speakers, including former students who had made a significant contribution to the world in some way, to address the students and staff. Dr Ellen Balaam, the first former female student to gain a medical degree (1915), regularly spoke at assemblies. The idea was, and continues to be, that the stories of women in leadership convey to the students what is possible for women in the world. Furthermore, presenting former students to current students has ensured that there remains a constant bridge between the past and the present and a sense of continuity with the students who have gone before. The same applies to former teachers and principals. The same model applies to the annual school speech nights where former students who have made an impact on the world in some way are invited to be guest speakers. These are important occasions because Mac.Rob can celebrate its success and confirm its identity with a good proportion of the Mac.Rob community and invited guests present.

Chloe Patton (whose mother also attended Mac.Rob) mentions that former principal Nina Carr came to school assemblies to speak to the girls at the beginning of the 1990s, emphasising the importance of being the right kind of girl at Mac.Rob; that kind of girl, in Chloe’s recollection, was one ‘who would not let the school down in any circumstance’. Thirty years before Chloe Patton arrived at Mac.Rob, a young enthusiastic Jessie Clark sat in the school hall loving every minute of the school assembly tradition:

We always began assembly with the school song: the English school song, which they don’t sing now, or the Latin school song, with the national anthem. Sometimes in between we would sing something else, or the choir or the madrigal group would sing. There would always be some formal component by the principal. There was usually a guest of some nature. So we

38 Some women recall Balaam as an inspiring woman, but more who participated in this research project remember her visits as those of an old woman who seemed to be fussed over by the staff but who had little relevance to students’ lives.

39 Interview with Chloe Patton, March 2005.
enjoyed assemblies—sitting out there in the hall, we really enjoyed those assemblies.40

Girls looked for and gained different insights and benefits from school assemblies. Some sought intellectual inspiration. Others had few expectations and still others had little idea of what to expect because of their limited experience of this form of higher culture. Some girls came to look forward to assemblies as an opportunity to consider new ideas and perspectives but others found them boring and irrelevant. Cultural and social background clearly had some impact on former students’ experiences. For Jessie Clark, a girl from a farming family who had previously attended Strathfield Presbyterian Girls’ School, the Mac.Rob assemblies in the late 1940s were never stuffy experiences; there were always interesting people coming to speak and perform. The weekly assembly, Jessie believes, ‘was an experience that seemed to open up new worlds, ideas and possibilities to receptive girls’.41 Renata Singer (Klein), on the other hand, argues that school assemblies in the 1960s lacked an intellectual focus, suggesting that, for her at least, rather than stimulating students, assemblies were mundane affairs to be endured rather than enjoyed.42 Former students are equally adamant that assemblies provided them with crucial insights about life beyond school; they were not merely forums for disseminating information about the school’s daily or weekly schedule. Rather, they were seen as a source of great pleasure, entertaining as well as informative, since they provided girls with regular opportunities for artistic performance and aesthetic appreciation. Judith Walsh, former Mac.Rob teacher and later principal of a state high school herself, argues that the weekly assemblies were, in her opinion, a ‘very good part of the school’; she emphasises the musical component, recalling it as ‘very big’, a reflection of the prominence music has long enjoyed at Mac.Rob.43

For some former students, assemblies were memorable because of where they were held. Assemblies at Government House were especially noteworthy because of the palatial surroundings. Rose Porter remembered vividly the beautiful ballroom, although her memories of the grandeur of the location are tempered by her experience of getting stuck in the back row at weekly assemblies and missing out on much of the proceedings because of poor acoustics. According to Rose, ‘We used to go there every Friday afternoon and some

40 Interview with Jessie Clark (Tilbrook), 23 August 2003.
41 Interview with Jessie Clark (Tilbrook), 23 August 2003.
42 Interview with Renata Singer (Klein), 26 July 2003.
43 Interview with Judith Walsh, 25 July 2002.
people used to perform—play the piano and sing a song. The “A” formers used to sit up the back and the “B” formers were up the front”.44 But just as the beauty and grandeur of assemblies at Government House are memorable for many, so too was the experience of walking in crocodile fashion through the streets of West Melbourne after market day and traipsing around rotting fruit and vegetables on the way to the town hall for the weekly assembly when the school was relocated to King Street Elementary School in 1932.45 For those who experienced both, the contrast between that inner-city venue and the splendour of Government House was striking.

Some former students remember best how the assemblies acted as forums at which principals could disseminate information and clarify their expectations of the students. Shirley Paine, in her autobiographical *Tiger Lilies*, provides an insight into the way her principal, Mary Hutton, used the assembly to speak about 'the value of good manners and hard work at all times'.46 Shirley also notes that her grandmother thought Miss Hutton wonderful because she told the girls publicly that they should ‘mend their clothes and that there was nothing disgraceful about wearing them in that condition’,47 an affirmation for girls and families who worked hard to maintain their respectability despite hard times. Shirley’s recollection of Mary Hutton’s purpose at assemblies is reminiscent of Evie Wallace’s memory of former headmistress Christina Montgomery using the assembly to encourage the girls in the years of the great Depression to maintain good hygiene practices in all circumstances.48 The assembly, then, was a useful forum for spelling out clearly appropriate codes of behaviour and ways of being for the students. This is not something that students from the most recent decades mention, however. Interviews with students from the 1980s suggest that assemblies increasingly came to be seen as performances, with an emphasis on visiting speakers and the students’ own artistic talents.

The school assembly remains an important part of tradition at Mac.Rob. Like the annual speech night, it is an opportunity for students and staff to confirm who they are and what they stand for as a community. It continues to provide opportunities for girls to perform in music and the arts, and it celebrates the many successes of the students during the school week. The assembly also serves as an informal means of communication as student

44 Interview with Rose Porter, 10 October 2002.
48 See chapter seven—Being a Girl, Being a Mac.Rob Girl.
achievements are showcased and enable the entire student body to see who is successful and how. Success acts as an inspiration and motivating force; recognising and celebrating individual, group, house and whole school success confirms and, importantly, affirms what is valued by the school.

The prefect system and the SRC

I left with a bitter taste in my mouth and memories of ridiculous rules about gloves and bossy prefects.

Robin Wren (Barker)

The ideal head prefect...is the “good all-rounder” whose keen interest and participation in all facets of the school has inspired others to do the same.

Suzanne Russell (Westcott)

Prefects were more seen as the people who stood at the doors and checked that you had your gloves on and your hat on. That was seen as their role.

Pallas, 1965

They thought the head prefectship would be good for me; you know—sort of help me to mature.

Gertrude (Rubinstein) Rabinov, head prefect 1935

I shall always remember Margaret Ellis [head prefect] for her care and support in the first year to a new principal and deputy [assistant] principal.

Nina Carr, former principal 1966–71

The prefect system played a significant role in the life of the school, particularly in tradition-building and tone-setting. From its inception, the role of prefect distinguished both the student and the school. Foundation principal Joseph Hocking described in his own school history how the prefect system emerged slowly as a tradition, mainly because pupils and teachers had little experience of student participation in school government beyond the roles of class monitor, ‘non-coms’ (non-commissioned officers) in the junior cadets and sporting team captains—with the last two of these privileging boys. The prefect system began with class prefects, who were nominated and selected by staff rather than popularly

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49 Student Representative Council.
elected by fellow students, and all positions were reviewed each term to ensure that those selected could indeed live up to expectations of them. Because students who had come through government schools had little experience of leadership, it was necessary to train the class prefects and groom potential candidates for the important position of head prefect.\textsuperscript{51}

As enrolments increased, the positions of school prefect and head prefect were added, and a formal prefects’ committee was established to assist in school governance through the supervision of assembly rooms and playing fields, the monitoring of pupil conduct on public transport and liaising with school staff on school committees.\textsuperscript{52}

At the MCS, pupils chosen as head prefects were selected (and rewarded) by the staff on the basis of academic distinction. Embedded in this method, however, was an assumption that the student who excelled academically possessed the key attributes of leadership valued by a school intent on building and consolidating a reputation for both academic and personal excellence. Early head prefects, in most cases, were chosen from the winners of the annual Rix Prize, an award established in memory of District Inspector of Schools, H. F. Rix, consisting of a medal and a selection of books. The recipients of this award (one girl and one boy), selected by the teaching staff, honoured the students who had shown exemplary personal character, ‘exerted the strongest influence for good’, and made the greatest scholastic progress.\textsuperscript{53} Being a recipient of such a prize at a time when prize-giving was an infrequent occurrence (Joseph Hocking did not encourage prize-giving himself but he came to accept prizes offered to the school) did not always bring immediate pleasure and acceptance. The story of Dora Hogan (Stillard), told in chapter seven of this thesis,\textsuperscript{54} reveals the dilemma she faced and her subsequent struggle in 1911 when she was selected as head prefect after winning the Rix Prize. Mary Lied (Tunnecliffe) also felt ambivalence as head prefect in 1931 when she was awarded a prize. Mary had serious doubts about her selection, and wondered whether the prize had more to do with her being head prefect than with general merit. She also had doubts about her appointment as head prefect that year. ‘I often wonder’, said Mary seventy-four years later, ‘if I was head prefect because Dad (the Hon. Thomas Tunnecliffe) was the Chief Secretary of Victoria. But there is a letter there that says I was voted in by the other girls’.\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{52} Hocking, \textit{Story of Melbourne High School}, pp. 22–3.
\textsuperscript{54} See Chapter Seven—Being a Girl; Being a Mac.Rob Girl; see also Interview with Dora Hogan (Stillard), October 1982.
\textsuperscript{55} Interview with Mary Lied (Tunnecliffe), 21 March 2005.
Until the prefect system was abolished in the 1970s, the head prefect’s role was to maintain traditions and high standards of conduct and to be a model that other girls would wish to emulate. The position certainly had advantages for the girls who were elected because they gained leadership experience, expanded their social and cultural horizons as the school’s official representative, and grew in confidence during their terms of office. As one girl wrote in *Pallas* at the end of 1965 regarding the potential of girls appointed as prefects, ‘Surely anyone who has led 900 girls through a school year will find success’. What the writer meant by success is unclear in present terms, but most likely it meant going to university or making a mark in the world somehow. It might also have simply meant not wasting one’s education and living up to expectations of responsible citizenship.

Mary Lied’s (Tunnecliffe) experience is one example of the desire of a young woman who had been head prefect for something other than a university degree. Resisting expectations of the day, she sought a singing career that fulfilled her aspirations but was more than likely regarded by others as a waste of the leadership training and experience she had been given at Mac.Rob. Mary possessed a beautiful singing voice and wished to use it professionally. She rejected office work, one of the traditional female occupations (nursing and teaching were the others) and took up a scholarship to study singing. Yet the power of convention remained strong and she gave up the idea after a year, deciding instead to do nursing. Her parents, although supportive of her musical aspirations, had insisted that she do some sort of training for a job that offered more security and Mary was glad in retrospect that she made the switch. In later life when her marriage ended, she was able to continue nursing and provide for her family as a single parent. In 1966, the prefects of that year inaugurated an award for the best all-round student. This award recognised excellence, but in a broader form than academic, musical or sporting success. Attitude, participation in school service, contribution to school life and popularity were also part of the selection criteria. The 1966 prefects’ award was unusual and innovative in being suggested and

56 *Pallas*, December 1965, p. 11.
57 Geoffrey Sherington et al. and Janet McCalman point out the strong relationship between leadership experiences at school and notions of citizenship and commitment to community. As Mary Lied was a commercial rather than an academic scholar, she was already at a disadvantage in a system that privileged academic success. See Sherington, Petersen and Brice, *Learning to Lead* and McCalman, *Journeyings*.
58 Interview with Mary Lied (Tunnecliffe), 21 March 2005. I did, however, sense some wistfulness within Mary Lied as she described her one-time desire to become a professional singer. Perhaps she was wondering what life may have been like if she had been able to take a different professional path in the 1930s.
funded by the prefects themselves, an initiative eminently suited to the empowering changes that marked the Carr era at Mac.Rob. It also, however, reinforced and rewarded traditional school values. The first recipients of the award in 1967 were Judith Smart and Lesley Richardson, both of them prefects, as might be expected: Judith for academic achievement, participation in sport and drama and for her work as co-editor of *Pallas*, and Lesley for her contribution to sport, house leadership and drama.\(^{59}\)

**The prefect system: learning for leadership**

> Participation in the extra-curricular areas was a vital way of invoking a passion for being in a house and supporting one another and competing with the other houses. The leaders of the extra curricular areas were crucial then, NOT the prefects—the prefects were seen more as rule enforcers than tradition imparters.

Suzanne Russell (Westcott) \(^{60}\)

The prefect system was an important part of the organisational structure of the school, not just as a form of role modelling, but as a conservative force for maintaining the tone of the school and day-to-day discipline. The work of the principal and teachers was made easier because of the prefect system, which provided covert and subtle forms of knowledge sharing. It disseminated both implicit and explicit guidelines on how a girl should behave and expectations that showed her where to draw the line between what was deemed appropriate and inappropriate. The prefects also acted as communicators between the headmistress or principal and the girls. Some prefects had a fear of letting the principal down and were thus acutely self-conscious. Modelled on the English girls’ private school, the Mac.Rob prefect system assisted order and discipline in an important sense; the prefects were constantly around, and a girl never knew when she might run into one as she rounded a corner or closed a locker door. The prefects understood their roles, their tasks, and what was expected of them, though much of this was never explicitly spelled out; the meaning of being a prefect was learned over the years from observing other prefects in their roles.

Prefects were an important part of the school hierarchy, monitoring students, reporting and correcting inappropriate behaviour in and out of school, organising school activities and representing the school at official functions. Many former students recall prefects checking

\(^{59}\) Discussion with Judith Smart, September 2005.

\(^{60}\) Interview with Suzanne Russell (Westcott), 27 April 2004.
their uniform as they arrived at school in the morning and left in the afternoon. It was not just about the wearing of hats and gloves, however, as girls could also be reported for poor dress standards: a frayed hem or shirt collar, a hole in a stocking or glove, the sight of a rubber band unprotected by a hair ribbon and even a hat incorrectly perched on a girl’s head could lead to a report. This was about inculcating feminine propriety as much as upholding the school’s reputation. There are numerous stories about girls’ encounters with prefects, and, for many former students, prefects are memorable for their unjust and insensitive actions more than for being sensitive and supportive leaders. Lorna Dennis recalls the day in 1931 a prefect took her name when she was travelling on public transport. Short in stature, Lorna was forced to stand on tiptoe to reach the strap above her head to hold herself steady throughout the journey. As a result, her head fell back with her hat moving to the back of her head. A prefect took her name, arguing that she was wearing her hat incorrectly. Lorna considered this unfair but could not defend herself for fear of exacerbating the situation; a girl did not argue with a prefect, let alone in a public space.61 Robin Wren (Barker) found the prefects at Mac.Rob a problem as well. In her recollection, they were extremely bossy and insensitive in comparison to those she had been used to at her previous school. ‘We had to have brand new gloves all the time’, she explains. ‘I repaired my gloves one day—it was a hot day—and I was told that my gloves needed replacing. So, there was a lot of nit-picking, bullying, in a way.’62

What of the prefects’ recollections? What was it like to be a prefect? Was it a different experience in different eras? To what extent did they consciously, or unconsciously, absorb elitist ideas about themselves and their roles? According to one group of former prefects interviewed for this history, this select few did tend to consider themselves separate from the rest of their fellow students, even though they were popularly elected. Having their own room in addition to their power and privilege set them apart.63 This group, which has met regularly since the 1940s, conceded that they felt themselves to be better than the rest of the girls at the time (although they and other former prefects shared many tales of good times in the prefect’s common room). In saying this they expressed embarrassment, explaining that the girls doing the professional course (mathematics, languages and science subjects) often felt superior to their commercial stream counterparts.64 Prefects almost always came from the professional stream, as those studying commercial subjects generally left school after year 10

61 Telephone interview with Lorna Dennis, 6 March 2003.
62 Interview with Robin Wren (Barker), February 2005.
63 Focus group, Victorian Arts Centre, 6 May 2005.
64 Focus group, Victorian Arts Centre, 6 May 2005.
(Intermediate) to enter the workforce. Susan Sherson (Terry), head prefect in 1958, remembers on the contrary feeling a deep sense of honour rather than any sense of superiority at her selection and throughout her term of office, and she was sensitive to the weight of the responsibility the position brought. She enjoyed her year as head prefect tremendously and strove constantly to live up to expectations of and faith in her. Other former prefects remember the prefects’ camps they attended as part of their induction into leadership at Mac.Rob, and at least one participant believes that those camps encouraged such strong bonds between prefects that they were inevitably regarded as different by the rest of the students.

The prefect system was finally abandoned in 1973 following Gwen Bowles’ appointment as principal. In Bowles’ recollection, it stands out that the discovery at school of one prefect in possession of marijuana was the final straw for a tradition that was being phased out in secondary schools throughout the state in any case. As the prefect system came under criticism, it was replaced by the more egalitarian and broad-based Student Representative Council (SRC), the president of which carried out some of the duties once allocated to the head prefect (who for years had automatically been SRC president). Jennie Rae, SRC president in 1974, argued in the school magazine that year that ‘one of the main reasons for abolishing the prefect system was to end sixth form domination and elitism’. As a representative, democratically elected body, the SRC sought to establish itself as the voice of all of the students, a departure from its predecessor, the Students’ Advisory Council (SAC). The SAC had been established in 1928 but had acted more as a part of school governance than representing and presenting student perspectives. According to Jennie, the SRC did not live up to expectations in its first year of operation because students were unwilling to support the executive committee in organising activities. Moreover, high levels of apathy meant that students did not follow through on decisions and become more actively involved. The following year, Jennie again pointed out that it was the sixth form girls (those who would normally have become school prefects) who were the most enthusiastic and energetic in the first year of the SRC—something she put down to their maturity and experience.

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65 Conversation with Susan Sherson (Terry), May 2005. Record in P. Parker’s journal.
67 Interview with Gwen Bowles, 26 September 2003.
68 Jennie Rae, Pallas 1974.
69 Jennie Rae, Pallas, 1975.
How did the SRC function within the school and its administrative framework, and how did it compare to the prefect system? Were there any similarities? With the demise of the prefect system, the SRC was conscious of the need to end the hegemony of the sixth form students over the other forms, and to mitigate their elitism which had been mythologised as a kind of dominion within the larger school community. There are plenty of stories to confirm this dominance, but just as many suggest a less harsh perspective. According to one former student, the younger girls had to learn the unwritten rules that allowed senior students to enjoy certain advantages. She recalled the case where junior students reserved seats in the hall by placing a card bearing their name on a chair, only to come back and find the card removed and a senior student sitting there.\(^{70}\) There was no redress against what was considered to be a ‘moral law’ by virtue of the length of time it had been practised, and resentment of what many saw as the prefects’ hegemony continued until the system was abandoned. Though hopes for a more democratic culture were high, the new SRC was likened to an ‘Apathy Club’ in 1975.\(^{71}\) This was a frustrated dig at students for not taking its existence seriously by becoming involved and supporting its ventures. In *Pallas* that year, Kathie Rae (presumably Jennie’s sister) wrote that ‘anti-SRC feeling grew to a climax early in the year and has since died down; those with an apathetic turn of mind do not even feel obliged to criticise any more’.\(^{72}\) She also pointed out that it was not just the SRC that suffered from student apathy; house activities were also affected by a similar lack of interest and support. With a final dig at the sixth form students, a disappointed Kathie reflected:

> No doubt some of the sixth formers at the conclusion of their school career can boast that they never in four years took part in any extra-curricular activity, while others will speak reluctantly and with misgivings about the time they took part in something in third form; a humiliating blemish on their record…The fact that apathy is so prevalent is a sad comment on the students of MGHS.\(^{73}\)

Kathie and Jennie would have been delighted to see changes they had hoped for in the mid-1970s begin to happen during the following decade as the SRC evolved as part of the developing school leadership program.

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\(^{70}\) *Pallas*, May 1982, p. 31.

\(^{71}\) Kathie Rae, *Pallas*, 1975.

\(^{72}\) Kathie Rae, *Pallas*, 1975.

\(^{73}\) Kathie Rae, *Pallas*, 1975.
Into the twenty-first century, the SRC includes the school and deputy captains, music and drama captains, captains of debating and public speaking, the *Pallas* editor, the sport captain and the website manager. The introduction of captains occurred in 2000, during Lesley Boston’s term as principal (1996–2004), its purpose to broaden existing leadership opportunities and experiences. Its introduction also brought Mac.Rob into line with other Victorian secondary schools, both state and private, which had popularly elected captains. Annual *Pallas* magazines reveal an effective and committed SRC team at Mac.Rob, these positions highly sought after by students of migrant backgrounds, particularly those from south and south–east Asia. As a representative body, the SRC is no doubt strengthened by the experience of an annual SRC camp, introduced in 2001, and where girls get to know one another better as they become immersed in the practicalities of their representative roles. The SRC focussed particularly on the broad multicultural base of the student population, and its members initiated annual events to celebrate Mac.Rob’s cultural diversity. ‘Go home tonight girls and remember that today we were successful!’ headlined the SRC report in *Pallas* 2000 following the success of Mac.Rob’s first ‘Cultural Corroboree’, which advocated Reconciliation and encouraged students to value multiculturalism in the school.74 The SRC now more effectively reflects Mac.Rob’s cultural as well as multicultural diversity as it draws to it girls who are perhaps sometimes less interested in other activities—sport, for example. As a body, the SRC enjoys prestige; parents, for instance, feel great pride when their daughters are elected to it as it ‘gives them invaluable experience and opportunity for leadership and organisation’.75

**The house system**

> *In no part of our school course does a pupil receive such a sound preparation for the battle of life as on the sports ground*”.

Joseph Hocking 76

> All of a sudden, there was a female house name—so we could relate to them. I was in the Naiads, and it’s still special to me.

Nancy Fraser (Horne), 1939 77

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76 Crotty, ‘The Limits of Manliness’. The girls, however, were not part of this conceptualisation. Hocking was thinking and speaking of the boys. It was Christina Montgomery who articulated a connection between sport as a preparation for life and girls’ education following the split in 1927. Not all girls agreed with her, preferring other pursuits to sport.  
77 Interview with Nancy Fraser (Horne), 9 October 2002.
There were houses, it seemed to me, specifically for the sporting competition as a way of bonding groups I suppose.

Robin Wren (Barker), 1956

We’ve got the spirit—lots of it.

Student in Pallas, 2003

Following the split into two schools in 1927, Christina Montgomery turned once more to Greek mythology for naming the new school houses—perhaps anticipating something of the contemporary spirit of environmental awareness in her selection of the Oreads, Nereids, Dryads and Naiads as the house symbols. These nymphs embodied the human capacity and obligation to care for their world. In Greek mythology, Oreads were the nymphs of the mountains, grottos and caves. One of the most famous Oreads was Echo, who, after imprudently embracing the ways of Narcissus, was condemned by the goddess Hera to speak only to echo others. Dryads, female spirits of nature, were born and lived in or near trees and each Dryad had a particular tree to watch over. If the tree died, the Dryad died with it, and if any mortal damaged her tree the Dryad would punish that mortal. The Nereids were ocean-going mermaids or nymphs. There were fifty sisters in the Nereid family and it is told in mythology that the Nereids, working together as a team, saved Jason and the Argonauts from the Wandering Rocks. The Naiads were also related to water. They were the nymphs of fresh running water and the daughters of Zeus, presiding over rivers, streams, brooks, springs, fountains, lakes, ponds, wells, and marshes. A Naiad was intimately connected to her particular body of water and her very existence depended on it for, if it dried up, its Naiad died. The waters over which Naiads presided were thought to be endowed with inspirational, medicinal and even prophetic powers. Thus, Naiads were frequently worshipped by the ancient Greeks in association with divinities of fertility and growth. The symbolism of the house names was important, as the selection of the nymphs offered the girls not only models for their own lives and characters, but knowledge of the natural world and their responsibility to preserve it.

The house system played, and continues to play, an integral role in student life, more than being simply a way of effectively organising students (who were divided into houses by surname) for extra-curricular activities. According to students from the 1960s and 1970s, the

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78 Interview with Robin Wren (Barker), 24 February 2005.
houses were about competition and building group loyalty, learning to co-operate, get along and deal with difference, and experience cohesiveness through a range of activities including sport, music, the arts and drama. For others they were, and are still, about learning to lead in the non-academic sense, there being great advantage in having this kind of experience at school. Historically, the school house acts as an informal way of sharing all kinds of knowledge, overtly and subtly, as girls watch, and listen and learn from one another. The house captains and vice captains are elected democratically, so there is an investment in being part of a house through choosing leaders and being involved in house activities.

The meaning of the house system varies among both former and current students, and its mention in an interview often brings forth a story of how a girl avoided sport, suggesting that this part of the curriculum has not been enjoyed by all and that the house system is often associated with sport rather than other activities. Former students disclose that they hated sport or were no good at sport and used a variety of stratagems to get out of participating. Rose Porter, one of Christina Montgomery’s students, laughed when asked whether she ever wagged sport. ‘Oh people did, but not me. I had to pick something, but all I managed to do was to go as far as the end of the field and I’d go to sleep if I could.’ Another student, Gertrude Rubinstein (head prefect in 1935), declared herself to have been a ‘bookie’ in the 1930s, preferring study to sport—a result of growing up in inner-city Carlton without many playmates or much space: ‘It was a very poor area and people didn’t stay there very long.’

Sport was an important part of girls’ education in the mind of Christina Montgomery as she created the house system for the new girls’ school. In 1928 she reflected on the qualities of the ‘modern girl’ in an article for Pallas in response to what she saw as ‘unjust malignation in some quarters’. Newspapers and popular women’s magazines, she believed, compared contemporary young women unfavourably to the girl of yesteryear. The headmistress assigned the blame for this prejudice to what she described as the failure to develop a

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81 See Sherington, Petersen and Brice, Learning to Lead, and McCalman, Journeyings. See also Bessant, Schooling in the Colony and State of Victoria and Connell et al, Making the Difference.

82 Interview with Rose Porter, 10 October 2002.

83 Interview with Gertrude Rubinstein (Rabinov), 2 October 2002.

84 C. Montgomery, Principal’s Report, Pallas, December 1928, p. 3.
sporting instinct in the early decades of women’s education, together with the then ‘prevailing puritanical conviction that the world was not a place to be enjoyed’. What, then, was the value of a ‘sporting instinct’ to Mac.Rob students? What advantage did it secure? What mores did it aim to inculcate? Its proponents use capitalist terminology to assert that a sporting instinct comes from the experience of competition and fosters feelings of solidarity and corporate spirit that are bound up in house and school sports. Being selected to represent the house or the school, competing and achieving victory, gives one an edge, a taste for competition and excelling, they argue. It also develops desirable qualities such as dedication, perseverance and self-discipline as the student trains for competition. The thrill of competing is pervasive, and winning for the school creates and mythologises the heroic figures that can be emulated and idealised. This provides continuity, a link with the past and a model for the present. This is what tradition is about. In some former students’ memories, however, sporting heroes did not figure largely at Mac.Rob. There were, and continue to be, some outstanding sporting achievements, but there were more stories of not playing than of eager participation. Wynne Higgins stated that girls certainly participated in house sports in the late 1930s but mainly because they were expected to. ‘Girls were largely conformists’, she explained. ‘They went in for house sports but little further’.

‘Wagging’ sport continued through the Barrett era (1955–65), according to Renata Singer reflecting on her school years in 2003. ‘It was pretty sport-oriented. That drove us mad’, she declared. Renata found sport a torture, a frightening experience in which girls had nowhere to play organised games and no proper equipment or uniforms. Many former students who enjoyed sport remember the lack of equipment and decent sporting grounds and venues; equally, many tell stories of how they avoided sport as often as they could. Judy Walsh, a Mac.Rob teacher during the Barrett-Carr years, believes moreover, that sport, as a non-academic subject, generally took a back seat to more prestigious subjects such as music. ‘There were some very good sportswomen’, Walsh explains. ‘They were always commented on in the sports report, but the actual celebrations of the sports took place off stage.’ Linda Edwards, a student from the Barrett years and part of a friendship group of non-sporty girls, contended that if a girl was good enough the house staff would put their energies into her, as

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85 Montgomery, *Pallas*, p. 3.
86 See Sherington, Petersen and Brice, *Learning to Lead*. The other school histories mentioned in chapter one also take up this theme.
87 Interview with Wynne Higgins, 28 August 2003.
88 Interview with Renata Singer (Klein), 26 July 2003.
89 Interview with Judith Walsh, 25 July 2002.
winning was the focus. ‘The houses’, in her opinion, ‘were designed to be competitive’. Clearly there is a difference between sport as an aspect of the school curriculum and competitive house sports, but girls who had no desire to participate in weekly sport sessions were not usually the heroes of the house competitions, though some compensated by excelling in activities such as drama and house chorals.

Into the twenty-first century, similar attitudes to sport prevail, but there whereas once girls tried to get out of sport (at both house and class level) because they did not like it, recent changes in the ethnic composition of the student population have seen girls of non-western backgrounds admit that they prefer to focus on their academic studies rather than play sport if they don’t have to. Where MHS’s elite sporting traditions were radically changed by an influx of Asian students, Mac.Rob had no comparable elite sporting tradition to consider—nothing like those of the private school sector that attracts far more elite sportswomen, often offering scholarships to secure their enrolment. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many Mac.Rob girls enjoy the role of supporter rather than athlete, and school magazines graphically illustrate the great enjoyment most girls experience at house sporting competitions where dress codes are significantly relaxed and girls don the colours of their houses to barrack for those competing in events.

Music

Recently retired principal Lesley Boston has suggested that sporting competition retains significance as an aspect of tradition, but that its extent has been constrained, not just by lack of interest, but also by geography and money; sport requires space and facilities, which Mac.Rob has coped without since the Continuation School opened in 1905. On the other hand, Boston explains, ‘music can be integrated into the lives of people who are academic’ more easily than can sport, and without such excessive demands on space. Many past and present students agree. Music has been an important part of school life at Mac.Rob, increasingly so since the 1980s, and former students recall with joy their experiences as part

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90 Interview with Linda Edwards, 17 February 2005.
91 Caroline Milburn, ‘Top Bottoms out when it Comes to Football’, Age, 4 October 2004. The article also pointed out that Mac.Rob had experienced a similar influx of students of Asian background.
92 See P. Parker’s journal for records of impromptu discussions with recent and current students on this topic.
93 Interview with Lesley Boston, 24 September 2004.
94 Interview with Lesley Boston, 24 September 2004.
of madrigals, the joint annual musical with MHS, ensembles, bands, choirs and orchestras. Some argue that music saved them by enabling them to move out of their ordinary, sometimes very difficult everyday lives into a happier realm. House chorals and other inter-house competition such as drama and the weekly house activities gave many girls experiences and opportunities they might otherwise have missed, whilst they gave others a chance to perform, to appreciate the performance of others and to extend themselves culturally. House competition also offered more girls an opportunity to participate, particularly girls who might not have made it into school choirs or specialist instrumental groups. Jessie Clark (Tilbrook) recalled the house chorals in the 1950s as very enjoyable events that gave students the opportunity to listen to music in addition to participating as performers. Not all girls were brought up in homes where music, particularly classical music, was valued and enjoyed, so the availability of such music at school was widely appreciated and embraced as a part of the school curriculum. Competition between the houses was strong, according to Jessie: ‘We were pretty keen for our house to win. We used to go to the South Melbourne Town Hall for the house chorals. So we had quite a few functions. We walked over in a long crocodile for the orchestral concerts’. Esme Burrows (Ellis), a member of Dryads house in the late 1930s, remembers, with great excitement, playing a violin concerto with her friend Joan and winning. According to Esme, the house chorals were quiet affairs in her day, but they were important cultural and social events, and winning a competition was a great thrill for her. Esme grew up in a family that revered music, and in which everyone played an instrument. Esme’s father made her violin himself and she took it to school nearly every day, ‘violin case in one hand and school bag in the other’. A shy girl, Esme immersed herself in music whenever she could, becoming an accomplished musician, although she never played professionally, unlike her close friend Joan, who ‘played even after marrying and having children’.

Historically, the music program (choral and instrumental) at Mac.Rob has drawn in exceptional talent, particularly through the allocation of specific music places—although prospective students must still sit the general entrance examination. The house system has provided girls with regular opportunities to perform publicly, both at school and beyond, and to use their talents to support all aspects of the arts at Mac.Rob. Girls thus gain valuable experience in organisation, practice, competition and performance success that might not be

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95 Interview with Interview with Jessie Clark (Tilbrook), 23 August 2003.
96 Interview with Esme Burrows (Ellis), 9 October 2002.
97 Interview with Esme Burrows (Ellis). Professional musicians include the current Melbourne Symphony Orchestra harpist, Julie Raines, who served as one of the school pianists in the late 1960s.
equally possible, nor affordable, in different school settings. Music also remains an important aspect of giving girls experiences of higher culture—a central element of the classical education for leadership in society.

Drama

Like music, house drama also gave, and continues to give, girls opportunities to perform and gain performance experience. Even those who did not play or sing could be involved in productions and gain useful skills and experience, particularly in important events like the annual musical dramas performed by students from both Mac.Rob and MHS—preparation and practise occurring over several months prior to public performances. Suzanne Russell (Westcott) recalled how delighted she was just to be able to help with the stage managing of the house dramatics in the 1950s. She was frank that she ‘had no talent whatsoever as an actor’, and glad to have something to contribute. She remembered proudly how she announced her role to her family at dinner one evening (her family somewhat taken aback at Suzanne’s joy in being a very minor contributor). Recent students agree with her, stressing that the organisational experience that comes with school productions is valuable in a girl’s all-round education. For decades, drama was confined generally to the drama club at Mac.Rob, but it assumed greater significance from the 1980s. In the twenty-first century, it is a major part of school life, at both house and school level. Many girls successfully carved out professional careers for themselves in the dramatic arts, from Wynne Higgins, a pupil in the late 1930s, who was involved in theatre as a performer and ‘Jill-of-all-trades’ throughout her life, to more publicly celebrated women such as actor, academic and author Alice Garner and musical theatre performer Chloe Dallimore, acclaimed star of the successful stage musical *The Producers* in 2004.

The house system has and continues to offer girls opportunities to excel both publicly and privately, or participate without the need to stand out. As Judith Smart, a student in the Barrett-Carr era explains, girls who enjoyed but were content to be less visible in sport, music and the arts than in their academic studies could participate in house competitions without the pressure of being noticed. Being a member of a school house at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first is important, according to recent and

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98 Interview with Suzanne Russell (Westcott), 27 April 2004.
current students, as a counter-weight to the intensity of the academic curriculum. House activities allow girls to let their hair down, dress up, cover themselves in paint and ‘be deliciously rowdy legitimately’,\textsuperscript{100} in the name of team solidarity. Even girls who do not excel in house competitions and activities can barrack for and encourage others. They can also be spontaneous. As one girl expressed it recently:

Many Mac.Robians would recall the unforgettable scene when all year 12 Nereids jumped up on stage lip-synching to Sister Act, making Mac.Rob’s school hall reminiscent of a convent choir hall’.\textsuperscript{101}

The interstate school exchange

\textit{The Adelaide folk are renowned for their hospitality, but no one can adequately describe their genius for entertaining.}

Joseph Hocking, 1922 \textsuperscript{102}

Another early tradition established to stimulate interest in sport and competition and to encourage a spirit of comradeship with students from a similar state high school environment was the annual school exchange. Often referred to as the Adelaide Exchange, this event saw representatives from the Continuation School and Adelaide High School travel interstate every other year. When the first exchange began in 1910, only boys were allowed to compete—in football and rifle shooting. By 1913, however, girls were also competing, with the addition of basketball and tennis to the program of events. Until the school split in 1927, the exchange was cancelled only twice—during the First World War and during the great influenza pandemic of 1919.\textsuperscript{103} In 1927, the official exchange program ceased as MHS and MGHS set about recreating themselves as separate schools. (Adelaide High School also separated along gender lines in the 1940s.) The exchange was re-established in 1950 for the boys’ school and in 1952 for Mac.Rob, and it continues today as a major school event.

The Adelaide exchange figured prominently in former students’ memories of being a student at Mac.Rob, in particular the journeys to and from the schools. As photographs in the school archive show, girls could never predict who they might encounter whilst travelling, as one

\textsuperscript{100} The annual \textit{Pallas} are full of pictures of the fun and dramatics of house events as girls support their houses but also compete in the ‘art of supporting’.
\textsuperscript{101} \textit{Pallas}, 2003.
\textsuperscript{102} Hocking, \textit{Story of Melbourne High School}, p. 29.
\textsuperscript{103} Hocking, \textit{Story of Melbourne High School}, p. 29.
group of Mac.Rob students discovered in the 1950s when they ran into Australian movie star Chips Rafferty at the airport. For many girls, the Adelaide exchange provided their first experience of interstate travel, of being away from home. Although this has ceased to be a novelty as girls are now far more experienced travellers, it is still happily anticipated. During the exchanges, girls have always been hosted by students’ families, an experience that opens up a new world to those who often find themselves in very different family environments. This sometimes led to lasting friendships and some women continue contacts made with other families. Shirley Anderson still has numerous photos of the host family from her stay in Adelaide during the 1960s. According to Shirley, after welcoming her with a barbecue dinner, her hosts found her a horse to ride when they learned about her love of riding. Diane Metherell, a student from the same era, still has her copy of the 1969 exchange program (see Appendix 2), and it reveals a broad and demanding social and sporting schedule.

Into the twenty-first century, contested activities include basketball, chess, cross-country running, debating, hockey, netball, singing, soccer, softball, table tennis, theatre sports, volleyball and Australian rules football. As with the long tradition of co-curricular and leadership activities, historically the interstate exchange offers broad experience in team leadership, event organisation, speech-making, and formal welcomes and farewells. School spirit is reinforced and celebrated through the friendly rivalry, and photographic displays in the school entrance foyer act as a reminder and memorial of the experience. The Adelaide exchange has been one of Mac.Rob’s enduring traditions, and one that has celebrated achievement broadly, not just in sports and arts, but in intellectual contests as well. Like the other traditions, it also survives to emphasise tradition, and to discourage dissent.

**Palladians**

*There are two pasts. One is a sequence of occurred events and of actions called forth [and] the perceived past...a much more plastic thing, more capable of being retrospectively reformed by human beings living in the present.*

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A sense of history is vital to the individual’s sense of personal and social identity, to a society’s establishment of cultural tradition, and to the models of the world that society wishes to transmit to its young and to posterity.\textsuperscript{105}

Tradition tends to act as a bridge across time, but often the value and meaning of a tradition are not immediately clear; a particular meaning may often be understood and appreciated or critiqued only after a student has left the school.\textsuperscript{106} Former students’ associations play a significant role in tapping into the old loyalties and a desire to retain a connection with the ‘old school tie’, often with little relation to actual schooling experiences (whether a girl remembered her time there well, badly or indifferently). According to Eric Hobsbawm’s concept of invented traditions, understanding traditions as providing historical and moral legitimacy that implies continuity with the past is problematic. To Hobsbawm, the continuity that is so important in Mac.Rob’s traditions and identity is ‘largely fictitious’. He argues that such traditions are ‘responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition’.\textsuperscript{107} (It would be useful to follow up Hobsbawm’s argument by examining specific Mac.Rob traditions and their reference points and connecting them with their meaning to the school community over time).

The first past students’ association was set up in 1909 (the Old Boys’ Association was set up first, with the Old Girls’ Association soon following), with Margery Robertson, headmistress at the Continuation School the inaugural president of the girls’ association. The Continuation School and MHS old girls’ association remained separate from the old boys’ association until 1917, but the partnership between the two formed that year dissolved when the school was divided along gender lines in 1927. The old girls’ association became critically important after the split because the school was in danger of being closed down permanently and former students who had done well in life could be called upon to offer significant support. Dr Ellen Balaam, one of the most academically and professionally successful students from the 1906 entry class, spearheaded the long struggle, described in chapter three, to keep the school alive, by appealing to both politicians and parents with connections to use their influence on the school’s behalf.


In 1930, the MHS ex-students’ association was renamed Palladians on Christina Montgomery’s initiative. An ex-students’ badge had already been created the previous year and quite a few found their way out of boxes and drawers to be polished up for display at interviews for this school history project. In order to build up support for and interest in the organisation, and to maintain a connection with the current school community, Montgomery gathered ex-students together for regular social and cultural outings and for sporting competitions between current pupils and ex-students. The group met to enjoy high tea at the Rivoli, for example, after which they went on to the theatre together, and, later still, a dance. On 30 May 1930 a back-to-school day was held. The Pallas magazine was filled with updates on old girls, and an annual general meeting was held at the school. The group enjoyed afternoon teas at the Botanical Gardens, a mock banquet at school, even a slide show using an epidiascope projector operated by the headmistress herself. In establishing an old girls’ association, Christina Montgomery ensured that women who returned to the school for social events and, later, to attend reunions felt a bond with the school, their school. The idea of the reunion, which is such a compelling focus at the turn of the twentieth-first century, suggests a sense of ‘getting on’, and there is an unmistakable feeling of mutuality, reciprocated support, self-congratulation and appreciation of achievement at each reunion. In 1940, 110 former students attended the Palladians’ annual general meeting, some of them perhaps mindful of a debt they felt they owed their old school in helping them find employment through the worst of the Depression years. The membership subscription that year dropped from five shillings to two and sixpence because of the effects of the Second World War. Efforts to retain members and encourage new ones tended to reflect general interest as well as economic conditions, with fewer memberships during times of economic downturn. These factors continue to influence membership into the twenty first century.

In 1977 exit students could join Palladians for one dollar if they continued on to higher education, an invitation that recognised a university student’s financial straits and also shrewdly encouraged girls who might be interested to continue on to higher education. Into

108 See Pallas 1930. Pallas magazines and Palladians Newsletters (PN) contain a wealth of information and narratives about former students—their personal experiences and their relationship with their old school.
109 Principal’s report in Pallas, 1930, pp. 1–3.
110 Pallas, December 1938, p. 51.
111 Some former students say that they do not really think about maintaining a relationship with their old school; they do not reject Mac.Rob, rather they have just moved on. Some are busy with other interests and demands, while some do not see remaining attached to their school as something that they need or want to do.
the twenty-first century, few exit students are expected to join the association, but they are invited. In 2003, however, only twenty women turned up to the annual general meeting. According to Jessie Clark (Tilbrook), when the girls are in their final year, the Palladians gather them together and encourage them to join. Typically, however, most girls who join Palladians do so some years later.\textsuperscript{112} One explanation for this is that when a girl starts at Mac.Rob she becomes a part of its life and culture, yet the meaning attached to the experience of schooling at Mac.Rob, and the desire to acknowledge and celebrate it, might not come until some years after she has left. There are many, like Wynne Higgins,\textsuperscript{113} whose lives after leaving removed them completely from the school. More often than not they reconnect through someone or some event, a chance meeting, a notice in a newspaper, confirming, perhaps, Hobsbawm’s observation at the beginning of this section. Then again, there are plenty of former students who do not associate formally with the school because it is not something that they feel a need to do, and some who do not wish to maintain any connection because they have moved on from that aspect of their past and see no point in reconnecting.\textsuperscript{114}

The Palladians have been, and continue to be, a significant part of Mac.Rob tradition in terms of financial contribution to the school, even though the number of women who attend annual general meetings has fallen significantly since the 1940s.\textsuperscript{115} Since its inception, the association has raised money to provide resources not available within a state high school’s budget. Traditionally, however, the Palladians have acknowledged and celebrated success and achievement through prize giving at the annual speech nights and the awarding of bursaries to encourage talented students to continue their studies. Typically, former Mac.Rob students do not have the disposable income their male counterparts may enjoy, and are thus less able to make significant financial endowments to the school. In spite of this, former Parents’ Association president Sue Renouf worked tirelessly to ensure that every aspect of the curriculum at each year level had a prize attached to it at the 2005 annual speech night—something that was important to her as a parent who values what Mac.Rob has given her daughter.\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{112} Interview with Jessie Clark (Tilbrook), 23 August 2002.
\textsuperscript{113} Interview with Wynne Higgins, 28 August 2003.
\textsuperscript{114} E-mail narratives of former students in author’s possession.
\textsuperscript{115} Principal’s reports in \textit{Pallas}, \textit{Vista} and \textit{Athena} regularly refer to the contribution made by the Palladians Association.
\textsuperscript{116} Interview with Sue Renouf, 28 September 2004.
During Mary Hutton’s tenure as principal between 1934 and 1948, the Palladians affiliated with the Victorian High School ex-Students’ Association, which sought to raise the status of Victorian high schools and high school students generally. Social and sporting events were held between associations and some even built club rooms as ex-student associations were set up in rural Victoria. Here in Melbourne, former student Jean Cowan (Wood) played netball (then known as women’s basketball) with the Palladians at the invitation of former head prefect, Trixie Renfree. According to Jean, she might have dropped out of the game completely had she not been a MGHS girl, and thus able to play with the Palladians.\footnote{Interview with Jean Cowan (Wood), 27 September 2002.}

Given Jean’s later significant role in the development of Victorian netball (she was Victorian Netball Association president for many years), her connection with the Palladians, one of the sport’s most successful clubs, was propitious to say the least.

There have been periods of uncertainty for the Palladians Association and not just from lack of interest. Daphne Barrett put a substantial effort into building up the association during her ten years as principal, and there was a great deal of loyalty to her as a consequence. When Nina Carr succeeded Barrett as principal in 1965, the once strong relationship between principal and Palladians was weakened. According to one contemporary Palladian, the association would have folded but for the good judgement of a small group of members. The story goes that Nina Carr’s appointment signalled sweeping change that was not welcomed by some former students and staff, and many of the Palladians were affronted at their perceived loss of influence. On the other hand, according to Suzanne Russell (Westcott), this group of Palladians was not quite as powerful as some have suggested. In Suzanne’s opinion, the Palladians have only been really successful since Gabrielle Blood was appointed principal and the school was forced to fight for its survival in the 1980s. It was Suzanne’s belief that Nina Carr’s uneasy relationship with the association stemmed from the fact that some ex-students who had become Mac.Rob teachers became involved in power plays within the school’s life, seeking to influence the curriculum and the employment and promotion of staff, for example.\footnote{Interview with Suzanne Russell (Westcott), 27 April 2004. Russell (Westcott)’s confident and controversial statement was one of the reasons the teachers do not figure prominently in this history. It is envisaged that a companion history will be written that gives voice to the teachers’ experiences and interpretations of being at Mac.Rob.}

Whatever the case, the Palladians recovered to become a vital part of the school review process in 1985, soon after Gabrielle Blood took up her position as principal. One of their prime contributions to Mac.Rob’s fight to justify its existence was to write letters of protest to anyone who might have some influence, objecting...
to any change in the school’s identity and location.\textsuperscript{119} This task, time-consuming, yet requiring swift action, brought former students together in a spirit of collegiality and loyalty. They had history to draw on as they helped fight for Mac.Rob’s existence yet again. It was during this time that Susan Sherson (Terry) became president of the Palladians and, with a group of loyal supporters, set out to reinvigorate the association as well as to re-establish a key supportive role within the school community.

In 2001 the Palladians, led by Wendy Taylor, were again called upon to support the school by contributing to a school history that would honour and celebrate Mac.Rob’s centenary in 2005, and assess the school’s achievements. Through its publication, Vista, the Palladians generated a massive groundswell of interest and support for the project and took on the job of organising its publication. Vista, the bi-annual newsletter and magazine, which reaches at least five thousand former students and their families and friends, provides a link with the past by publishing stories of the experiences and achievements of former and current students. In addition, through the annual magazine, Athena, former students have been able to remain connected to their old school and its social, cultural and academic activities and achievements as a state provider of girls’ secondary education. Opinions are presented regularly in a broad, egalitarian forum, on a range of issues, and former students are encouraged to contribute to discussions ranging from educational, social and gender debates to travelogues and life histories. These women not only inform and share information and ideas, they provide inspiration to one another with their life stories and perspectives.

**School colours**

One of the more recent school traditions, the school colours system, was placed under scrutiny in the year 2000 and reaffirmed as a valued leadership tradition. School colours were first awarded in 1988 by then principal, Gabrielle Blood, for outstanding contribution to the school outside the regular academic and house activities, which were already recognised through house awards and a range of other prizes. The awarding of school colours was, arguably, a further imitation of the private school model and the first major innovation in tradition-building since the termination of the prefect system in the early 1970s. How are students selected for school colours? This is done by members of the teaching staff, who make nominations to the school principal.\textsuperscript{120} The names are then discussed with the SRC president and vice president, with the principal making the final


\textsuperscript{120} Interview with Gabrielle Blood, 1 September 2003.
choice. The criteria include demonstrating a high standard of personal behaviour, strong school spirit, co-operativeness with staff, and being a positive role model for other students. School colours are awarded in music, drama, debating and public speaking, student leadership, social service, and sport. Girls have to have participated in at least two school teams or music groups and demonstrated responsibility and commitment to their chosen field. A general award is also given to students displaying leadership qualities in several aspects of school life. This award, reminiscent of the 1966 Prefect’s Prize, connected a past tradition with a new one—one that continues in the twenty-first century.

The introduction of the school colours system, and its later review, revealed that the Mac.Rob community could draw on established traditions, adapting and modifying them as it wished, and introduce new traditions in the process of shaping its identity. Like the SRC, the house system reinvigorated itself towards the close of the twentieth century after suffering a loss of interest and appreciation in the 1970s and 1980s. In 2005 the idea of a portrait gallery to honour achievement and diversity at Mac.Rob was initiated, to be developed under the guidance of assistant principal Marilyn Smith and a support committee. This gallery is innovative in structure in that it plans to vary its subjects, so that the idea of success is not set in stone. The idea for the gallery came from the portrait gallery MHS established after the boys moved to Forrest Hill in 1927, and it seeks to memorialise the diversity of student achievement whilst having wider public appeal to visitors as an acknowledgement and celebration of Mac.Rob’s past and future. The gallery remains a work in progress throughout 2006.

Recasting the identity of Victoria’s first academic girls’ state high school has been a process of inventing tradition and making history. Occasionally described as ‘a pseudo private school’ because of its emphasis on academic achievement and tradition, Mac.Rob has continued to strengthen its identity by preserving and valuing its traditions. There are lighter sides, however, to the importance and meaning of tradition that have been communicated to the students. When asked how girls were imbued with Mac.Rob traditions, for example, Suzanne Russell (Westcott) explained with a broad grin that ‘the fact that Sir Dallas Brooks (Victorian state governor 1949–63) sent the girls home to celebrate the unveiling of the big mural helped!’ On the other hand, tradition building has sometimes had a darker side for students who did not live up to expectations of the ideal girl, as Chloe Patton explains. Chloe

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121 At this point, there is no clear indication of when this prize was last awarded.
122 Interview with Suzanne Russell (Westcott), 27 April 2004
was given a detention for misbehaviour, and she, along with other girls, was given cleaning rags and bottles of Silvo and placed in a room with all the cups, shields and trophies from the displays near the offices. ‘What better reminder of the traditions you are supposed to be upholding’, declares the former student ironically, ‘than being made to stare at decades of inscriptions!’ Chloe’s era is also significant for tradition at Mac.Rob because it saw another change in the ethnic composition of the student population and highlighted differences between Western and Eastern cultures and traditions. Chinese women, for example, have traditions but not ones built on western and Greek antiquity. That said, parents of former students of all backgrounds believe that a school with strong traditions whatever their context, has, in their opinion, historical legitimacy, and that is important to them.

The following two chapters introduce the women who led MGHS and Mac.Rob from 1927 following the division of MHS into separate schools. In Chapter Five, we meet headmistresses and principals who continued the strict, conservative patterns of leadership established in 1905 at the Melbourne Continuation School, patterns very much modelled on successful male headship. That said, each woman still brought to her position her own values and expectations, and decades of experience as she advanced professionally within the constraints of the male-dominated Victorian Education Department.

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123 Interview with Chloe Patton, March 2005.
Chapter Five

Women and headship at Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School 1927-1965

Christina Montgomery

A stern, imperious little Miss Montgomery was called at school, behind her back, “Monty” or “Munty”; but to some she was humourless, cold, pretentious and arrogant, to those allowed to get a little closer to her she had a dry wit, a dignified presence, and a passion for the success of her “gerrls”.

Gwyneth Dow & Lesley Scholes

Miss Montgomery was a character. That’s why I remember her you see. She was a character, a character.

Rose Porter 1930s

Miss Montgomery was the lady principal—a tiny lady commanding high respect and love from the students, with her favourite saying, “Girl, control yourself”.

Alberta Watson, former MCS pupil and MGHS teacher

Miss Montgomery would come along and I suppose we’d all be slouched over and she’d say, “Up girls! Up girls!”

Jean Cowan (Wood), 1928–29

I hung myself up in the dungeons one day to avoid Monty, so that she could go through in her lace dress, her curtain dress as we called it. I hung myself up beneath someone’s coat.

Helen Manton 1920s

She was the principal. She was the “head”. That’s how you looked at her. She was always in control and you felt that you had to do what she said.

Jean Ayers (Fenton), 1929

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2 Interview with Rose Porter, 10 October 2002.
3 Memoir of Alberta Watson, MGHS Archive.
4 Interview with Jean Cowan (Wood), 27 September 2002.
5 Interview with Helen Manton, 11 November 1982.
6 Interview with Jean Ayers (Fenton), 4 March 2003.
As a classical scholar, Miss Montgomery was steeped in the myths and legends of the Greeks and Romans, and she was ahead of her time in having travelled to the ancient ruins of Europe.

Winifred Lade (Tinkler) 1928–31

Christina Smith Montgomery was born in Scotland on 21 March 1870. She arrived in Australia with her parents, William and Janet, and her sister Margaret, on the Orient liner SS Austral in 1884. Both girls attended Cambridge Street School in Collingwood, where Christina was appointed a probationary pupil-teacher on 1 September 1886. Janet Montgomery bore another daughter and son in her adopted land, but the marriage was troubled and William eventually deserted his family to live in New Zealand for the remaining seventeen years of his life.

Farley Kelly, in Degrees of Liberation,¹⁰ a study on women at the University of Melbourne, describes Montgomery as an experienced teacher, a product of the uncompromising and demanding pupil-teacher system, whose career was spent largely in country schools. As such, she was typical of women teachers in the early decades of the twentieth century—a time, according to Kelly, ‘in which success and promotions came slowly’.¹¹ Christina Montgomery’s teaching assessments describe her as intelligent, thoughtful, diligent, smart, capable and having great command over her large classes, a ‘valuable find’, amiable, energetic and educationally up-to-date.¹² A comment made about her in May 1904 by school inspector Walter Gamble offers a valuable insight into both her leadership ability and her character. Gamble, described by R.J.W. Selleck as a stern, ‘belligerently conservative’ and at times tyrannical man,¹³ remarked that Montgomery achieved excellent classroom control more by her force of character than by displays of

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¹ Memoir of Winifred Lade (Tinkler [Tinks]), 1 December 2004, MGHS Archive.
² Christina’s sister, Margaret, was appointed a pupil-teacher (probationary) at the same time.
⁴ Farley Kelly, 1985, Degrees of Liberation: A Short History of Women in the University of Melbourne, The Women Graduates Centenary Committee of the University of Melbourne, p.54.
⁶ Teacher Record, Christina Smith Montgomery, VPRS 13718, Unit 32.
authority,\textsuperscript{14} an important observation that allows better understanding of the woman responsible for setting MGHS on its way in 1927.

As was the case with Margery Robertson, Christina Montgomery’s disciplinary acumen set her apart from other prospective candidates when the Director of Education, Frank Tate, began his search for the first Continuation School staff. Although Montgomery’s ability to command authority was a contradiction of a long and widely held belief that women were unable to discipline boys in their formative years, her capacity to do so made Montgomery exactly the kind of teacher Tate needed. Her experience, qualifications and professional knowledge made her stand out among other well-qualified teachers, and are evidence of her drive and ambition. After completing her initial Trained Teacher’s Certificate she had earned a Master of Arts degree whilst teaching full time, something that other pioneering women teachers also achieved. It was often the only way a teacher could afford to gain a university qualification. In addition, Montgomery completed several university courses in a variety of disciplines, including zoology, chemistry, physiology and botany, and then broadened her teaching and life experience by spending a year at the Perth Central School in Western Australian teaching evening classes.\textsuperscript{15}

At the Continuation School Christina Montgomery threw herself into all aspects of school life open to her as a woman. She took on every available duty, including filling a gap in staffing by volunteering to be librarian of the pupils’ library. She was sub-editor of the school magazine, \textit{Ours}, and, as patron of the ex-students’ association, she generated renewed interest and participation in it at a time when enthusiasm was flagging.\textsuperscript{16} Her commitment, determination and energy appear boundless from the vantage point of the present. Christina Montgomery’s career qualified her perfectly for the highly coveted headship of Melbourne Girls’ High School. She was well travelled, having studied the educational methods of girls’ secondary schools in England, Scotland, France and Germany, and corresponded with the Education Bureau in Washington.\textsuperscript{17} She had extensive knowledge of issues relating to girls’ education. Not all of her travel was work

\textsuperscript{14} Teacher Record, Christina Smith Montgomery, VPRS 13718, Unit 32.
\textsuperscript{15} Teacher Record, Christina Smith Montgomery, VPRS 13718, Unit 32. See also Dow and Scholes, ‘Christina Montgomery’, pp. 171–92, and Dow, ‘Montgomery, C.S. (1870–1965)’, p. 558.
\textsuperscript{16} See \textit{Ours} magazines from 1907; see also Montgomery’s letter of application for the position of headmistress at Melbourne High School following Margery Robertson’s retirement: Christina S. Montgomery, Letter to the Public Service Commissioner, 12 December, 1921. VPRS 10249, Unit 32 File 10616.
\textsuperscript{17} Christina S. Montgomery, Letter to the Public Service Commissioner—Montgomery describes her professional experience. See also Dow and Scholes, ‘Christina Montgomery’, pp. 171–92.
related, however; she also spent time visiting the places dear to her heart as a passionate student of the Classics. Her constant pursuit of knowledge added to her professional appeal, as the Victorian Education Department encouraged (and expected) teachers to be conversant with a variety of educational ideas and practices, particularly at an international level.\(^{18}\) The *Education Gazette and Teachers’ Aid* regularly published articles on educational developments, practices and ideas in Europe and America, but Montgomery was one of a privileged few in the Victorian state school system to experience such educational developments and ideas first hand. Montgomery’s experience and knowledge were not confined to the teaching sphere and her love of literature; she was no passive educationist. As she took on every duty at the Continuation School, she also established valuable professional connections through her membership of educational associations. She was vice president of the Victorian Council of Education, a member of the Teacher Registration Committee and of the University of Melbourne Classical Committee from its inception in 1913. She also belonged to the Lyceum Club, a membership-by-invitation club providing intellectual and social interaction for professional women and still going strong today.\(^{19}\) Montgomery was a significant figure in the developing state education system, although the bureaucrats and policy-makers were all men.

‘Monty’

Tiny, diminutive, fleeting, a shadow, imperious, forceful, acerbic, dour, forbidding, witty—these are just some of the words used by Mac.Rob women in thinking about Christina Montgomery. When former students speak about her, some tend to endow her with almost mythical qualities, while others recall her rigorous discipline and dour exterior. That said, it was her striking physical appearance that first came to mind for Evie Wallace, a MHS student in 1926. In remembering her headmistress, Evie evokes an image of a tiny, beautiful and feminine woman who had great presence:

If we went anywhere she’d be dressed in something lovely, shimmery. She was a wonderful little woman. She gave me a feeling of beauty, a feeling that you should appreciate beauty. And she had a little barrel organ. Friday afternoon was a musical afternoon and she always attended it. She gave me a love of music that I never forgot. She’d say, “Listen to the birds” while they

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\(^{18}\) Christina S. Montgomery, Letter to the Public Service Commissioner.

\(^{19}\) Dow and Scholes, ‘Christina Montgomery’, pp. 171–92.
were playing, and that’s always how I listen to music, always. She gave me that and I loved her.20

At the same time, Montgomery, a woman whose penchant and gift for irony was a legendary aspect of her authority, appeared forbidding, even fearsome, to Evie. Monty was hard to get to know, perhaps because it was not possible for most girls to see beyond her forbidding manner, and Evie admits feeling a little frightened of her. ‘Although’, she concedes, ‘that didn’t harm’; it was no less than Evie expected of her headmistress.21 As Frederick J. Gladman taught the teachers in training in the late 1880s, familiarity was not the handmaiden of successful leadership and discipline.

Dorothy Fry, a MGHS student in 1929, remembers Montgomery as a capable and adept woman. She was, in Dorothy’s opinion, an outstanding manager, able to perform a range of important tasks (such as negotiating the use of suitable sporting facilities outside the school so that the girls could actually play sport), in addition to her role as headmistress of both the girls’ school and the Correspondence School. She was able to have a number of fingers in different pies and manage efficiently, something that made a lasting impression on Dorothy (who went on to carve out a successful career as a pioneering school principal herself).22 To Lorna Dennis, Christina Montgomery was a woman who had a presence that radiated authority, the ideal model for a maturing young girl of what a woman could be in life. Lorna easily recalled her former headmistress’s disciplinary expertise. One of Montgomery’s most successful stratagems was to step out of the shadows unexpectedly as students made their way around the school—a practice that could frighten a girl out of her wits. ‘It was as if she was a ghost, moving all over the school unseen except when she wanted to be seen.’23 Lorna, a somewhat refractory student in cookery class, knew her headmistress a little better than others did perhaps because she was often sent to the office for misconduct. On one such occasion, Miss Montgomery simply brought her hand to her face and smiled behind it. Sometimes the headmistress sent Lorna to another class to give the cookery teacher (and Lorna, perhaps) some respite, but the former student recalls that nothing terrible ever happened to her—her memories of her headmistress are happy ones.

21 Interview with Evie Wallace, 9 August, 2002.
22 Interview with Dorothy Fry, 27 September, 2002.
23 Telephone interview with Lorna Dennis, 6 March 2003.
Jean Catford also remembers Christina Montgomery’s gentleness, a side of her character she experienced ‘even when being reprimanded for wearing a less than spotless uniform’. According to Jean:

I was walking up from the tram one day, coming in to school. And she [Miss Montgomery] must have been on the same tram. We were walking up together and I had on a blouse with a bit of a stripe in it owing to the fact that I probably hadn’t washed my blouse, or it wasn’t dry or something, and she reprimanded me gently for wearing it. She was quite nice about it but, you know, a thing like that…

Jean’s experience was typical of problems experienced by girls struggling to maintain a presentable appearance during the Depression. Christina Montgomery’s headship covered most of this period, and girls’ stories of their experiences at the time illustrate how successfully the headmistress coped with the numerous demands upon her, and how well she helped her students to cope. From women’s stories of their schooling, it is evident that Montgomery was aware of the straitened circumstances of many of her students, from both working-class and middle-class families. Unemployment in Australia rose dramatically from 9.3 per cent in January 1929 to a peak of 30 per cent in mid-1932. Montgomery knew when fathers, and occasionally mothers, lost their jobs and when families were forced to move house once they could no longer pay the rent. While the girls occupied the Spring Street site, she and her staff arranged for baskets to be placed on the balcony and in the cookery centre so that girls could donate spare sandwiches to others in the local area. Community service was a fundamental element of school life, and thus the making of women, whatever paths the students might take later in their lives.

Unemployment in Australia reached its peak during Christina Montgomery’s headship and it was within this context that the headmistress began to give ‘pep talks’ at weekly school assemblies. These talks were about keeping up appearances in the worst of circumstances and learning how to make the best of the most wretched of living conditions. Gertrude Rubinstein (Rabinov) remembered the 1920s and 1930s as a time when working-class
families did not have hot water services, with few having even chip heaters. ‘There was’, she explained, ‘no such thing as a hot shower’. Most people had a weekly bath, often in the kitchen sink or in the laundry, which doubled as a bathroom, and for many it was a matter of boiling up the copper and bucketing hot water into the sink. 27 Christina Montgomery reinforced the necessity of the weekly bath at the assemblies, but added that the girls should sponge themselves carefully every day to maintain good hygiene. She spelled it out clearly for them so that there was no misunderstanding. She also reminded them to polish their shoes every day and keep their uniforms washed and ironed to maintain a good appearance. Evie Wallace recalled Montgomery’s pep talks vividly, divulging that the girls did not lose their senses of humour even in the worst of times for, when the headmistress reminded them to wash all over, they replied in unison, ‘And don’t forget your bottom!’ 28 This was not, perhaps, an experience repeated, so publicly at least, at Victorian private girls’ schools at the time.

As headmistress during the Depression, Christina Montgomery faced difficult decisions on a daily basis, and her concern for her students’ welfare was often moderated by departmental policy. There were numerous requests from parents to be excused from paying school fees for a term or two and for extra time to pay. Some parents requested the suspension of accumulated fee debts while others sought outright fee exemptions. In 1928, Alma Kendal applied for free tuition when her parents could not afford the fees. Her application was accepted, but only on the condition that she showed a marked improvement in aptitude. 29 Beatrice Hutton faced similar pressure in January 1932. Education was a privilege and even in hard times that privilege brought with it responsibility, a message that was made clear to the students. 30 In the Depression years, when girls might have been better off at school than unemployed, competition for free places intensified and the Education Department took the opportunity to weed out girls deemed undeserving of the privilege of a secondary education because they did not work hard enough or failed to achieve satisfactory passes. As headmistress, Christina Montgomery was often caught in the middle, with the Department trying to collect unpaid fees on the one side, and families in varying degrees of financial trouble on the other.

27 Interview with Gertrude Rubinstein (Rabinov), 2 October 2002. Reba Beamish (Howell) remembers that around 1929 her family’s chip heater broke down so her mother took the family off to the city baths to enjoy the comfort of a slipper bath. Lorraine Hemingway, 2003, Reba’s Story, Unpublished Manuscript, MGHS Archive, p. 26.
29 Correspondence file, VPRS 10249, Unit 27.
30 Correspondence file, VPRS 10249, Unit 27. See also Unit 128.
The Department constantly requested information about unpaid fees, wanting to know whether or not a father was in employment, and many girls were threatened with suspension. The Department notified the headmistress of pupils who were to be excluded from school for unpaid fees, and she was sent lists of girls not to be admitted unless their fees were paid in full. In 1931, 108 girls were pursued for these fees and 80 were withdrawn from the school. Edna Tay’s mother wrote to the Education Department requesting permission to pay the £4 she owed in fees in two instalments, a month apart. Her request was approved but only on condition that the fourth term fee was paid on time. In 1932 another 65 families were found to be in arrears and, on one occasion, the headmistress refused entry to a student, in keeping with the Department’s directive. The girl’s father threatened to appeal to the Minister of Public Instruction and the Director of Education, Martin Hansen. Christina Montgomery stood firm on the matter, resisting pressure to change her mind, but she drew on departmental policy, telling the parent that her hands were tied by bureaucratic regulations. The matter was closed. The Department continued to request information, including further details of fathers’ incomes, to assess the validity of parental requests for the waiving of fees. This was, perhaps, a difficult task for the headmistress, for a father in the 1930s might well have felt uncomfortable giving such personal details to a woman. Indeed, some fathers tried to communicate directly with Martin Hansen, but he sent the letters on to the headmistress, insisting that the bureaucratic chain of command be observed. He must have been relieved to be free of the responsibilities shouldered by Christina Montgomery and heads of high schools more generally.

Christina Montgomery’s relationship with the Education Department bureaucracy was rarely a smooth one, judging from the kind and quantity of communications that passed between them during her headship. Perhaps, as a woman of common sense, she objected to the pedantry of the bureaucrats who had established strict protocols on how every aspect of school organisation was to be conducted. She was often admonished for failing to follow correct procedures. In 1928, for example, she was warned that she was not using the correct

31 Correspondence file, VPRS 10249, Unit 27.
32 Correspondence file, VPRS 10249, Unit 27.
33 Correspondence file, VPRS 10249, Unit 27.
34 Correspondence file, VPRS 10249, Unit 27.
35 Hansen’s correspondence suggests that he rarely took the side of a parent who might request his intervention on behalf of a daughter in relation to MGHS, and he routinely referred parents seeking a high school education for their daughters on to girls’ schools (non-academic) and domestic arts schools close to their homes. Correspondence reveals that more girls wanted to study commercial subjects (to get jobs) than were places available and the pressure on Montgomery to cater for girls was constant. See communications from parents and Departmental actions in VPRS 10249, Unit 27.
sized paper for her written communications.\textsuperscript{36} That same year she used incorrect language when she requested the services of a clerk instead of a messenger. She pressed her luck when she tried to obtain extra office staff, for she was quickly refused. In July 1928 an account forwarded to the department for repairs to a gas stove was returned to her because she had submitted her request on the wrong form. Again that month she was reminded that she had to report promptly the commencement date of any teaching staff to the department, and was instructed to check the \textit{Education Gazette and Teachers’ Aid} to learn how to report multiple absences in the one letter to the department.\textsuperscript{37} Admittedly the \textit{Gazette} provided crucial and up-to-date information, but it was no manual for mastering Department bureaucracy. In November 1929, the headmistress was rebuked for communicating directly with the Public Works Department concerning urgent repairs to a sink in the chemistry room, and she was directed to forward such requests to the Buildings Branch in the event of any such emergencies in the future.\textsuperscript{38} Perhaps one of the most serious indictments of her came in April 1931 when she was admonished by the Department for reporting a student as showing a special aptitude and promise, an impression not reflected in the student’s poor marks.\textsuperscript{39} Was she trying to secure this student’s place within the school when non-payment of fees was a continuing issue, or did she recognise potential in this student that did not translate to examination success? Perhaps, in repeatedly bringing her into line, the Department was exhibiting concern that Montgomery was trying to change existing organisational structures, possibly even the culture of the Education Department bureaucracy.

\textbf{Leaving Spring Street}

In 1931, the entire school transferred to Government House. As headmistress, Christina Montgomery had to notify her staff and students of the relocation during the term holiday, then organise the transfer of the school’s entire resources—although, by some accounts, the boys had taken everything that was not nailed down with them to Forrest Hill four years before, so there may not have been much more than the basics to transport. The move to Government House was a significant victory for MGHS because it meant that the school was safe, at least for a while. As we have seen, Montgomery had instituted new traditions (and retained others) when the boys departed and, with the support of her staff, she forged a new

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\textsuperscript{36} & VPRS 10275, Unit 128. \\
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path for the girls that made them competitive with the boys of MHS. The world really was
their oyster, the headmistress regularly reminded the students—at weekly assemblies, in the
school magazine and at the annual speech nights—to inspire them to greater things in their
lives. She drew on the successes of former students, acknowledging them publicly as she
held them up to the girls as examples of what they might do in life, of what was possible.
Marriage and motherhood were not in Christina Montgomery’s vision for her brighter
students; she hoped that these girls would further their educations and make an impact in the
world. Gwyneth (Gwyn) Dow, who taught at Mac.Rob, and Lesley Scholes, a former head
prefect, tell the story of Monty’s response to the news that one of her most brilliant old girls
had become engaged: ‘Oh dear. What a waste’. 40

Christina Montgomery retired in December 1932, two years before official retirement age.
There has been continued speculation about her timing. One school of thought prefers the
idea that she retired to enable another woman to move into what was a rare position for a
female in the department. Another suggests that she may have tendered her resignation to
pressure the government into providing the school with permanent premises, thus securing
its future. Joseph Hocking had used the threat of resignation to influence policy decisions in
1909, but the strategy had backfired on him. Where he had been able to withdraw his
resignation, however, Christina Montgomery was not so fortunate—if that is indeed what she
wanted to do. A retirement of over thirty years is almost an age in itself, but Montgomery
continued her interest in the school and in the Classics. She published a well-researched and
thoughtful book discussing topical arguments about Shakespeare’s plays—a book that was,
to former students, an excellent example of how to do impeccable research and structure
logical arguments to support a point of view. 41 ‘Monty’ often returned to speak to the girls at
assemblies, to inspire them to bond to the school’s traditions and the ideas those traditions
represented. She devoted a great deal of time to the old girls’ association, the Palladians,
which she knew from her own experience was an important part of the school community,
and she was its glue during her lifetime. ‘Monty’ died in 1965 at the grand old age of 95,
having spent 33 years in retirement.

Christina Montgomery’s resignation set in motion a chain of events that provoked
controversy on a scale not seen to that point, and what followed was just as much about the
purpose of education, and girls’ education in particular, as it was about the fate of one girls’

41 C. M. Montgomery, 1946, Shakespearean Afterglow, Robertson and Mullins, Melbourne. Three
editions were printed.
state high school. The story of Montgomery’s replacement, Sybil Llewelyn, reveals the complexities of the very public stoush between the education profession and the education bureaucracy and what it all meant for the future of MGHS.

Sybil Llewelyn

*Like Miss Montgomery, she is a role model of the modern woman liberated by education. She is Athena but she is my headmistress. To me she seems as remote as Olympus.*

Ennis Honey

*I always thought of her (Miss Llewelyn) as a rather good-looking lady—rather beautiful in fact. When I knew her, her hair was bouffant style, although in a bun with never a hair out of place. She had greyish eyes tinged with brown. She had a graceful elegance as did her mother.*

Former student and Mac.Rob teacher, Ethel Mann

*At West Melbourne we had a chamber music group. We used to practise after school in one of the temporary classrooms that had been moved there to accommodate us. Miss Llewelyn used to be there with us. Her deep love of music was very apparent. I loved those rehearsals and often when we had finished Miss Llewelyn would just talk with us. I remember my schoolgirl awe of the poet Rupert Brooke. Miss Llewelyn had not only been at university with him, but had been a personal friend of his.*

Ethel Mann

*I compare Miss Llewelyn with my mother. My father says that old maids are unhappy. They’ve been “left on the shelf”. They envy women with husbands and families. Miss Llewelyn doesn’t look unhappy but mother does and it’s she who envies women like Miss Llewelyn. She says they’re free to do whatever they like.*

Ennis Honey

Sybil Llewelyn is a shadowy figure in Mac.Rob’s official past. This is partly a consequence of the nature of her appointment and its association with the school’s possible closure, of her temporary status and brief term as headmistress, and of a general lack of awareness of her association with the school in 1933. There are no photographs of Sybil Llewelyn. As a temporary principal, she is not listed on the former principals’ memorial board and there are

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43 Interview with E. Mann, 4 October, 1984.
44 Interview with E. Mann, 4 October, 1984.
no portraits or memorial prizes that position her publicly within Mac.Rob’s past. She is, perhaps, best remembered in the oral histories and autobiographical writings of girls who were with her at Government House and King Street, West Melbourne. Sybil Llewelyn’s association with MGHS was brief. It was also controversial and fiery, for her temporary appointment triggered a battle between the teachers’ union, the Education Department, and the government of the day, due to the Department’s failure to advertise the position upon Christina Montgomery’s retirement.

Sybil Audrey Augusta Llewelyn was born at Rhyndwyclydach, Glamorgan, in Wales, on 23 July 1884, the year the first Women’s Suffrage Society was founded in Victoria. She passed the London Matriculation in 1902 and later won the prestigious Glamorgan exhibition as a medical student at the University of Cardiff. Illness interrupted her studies, however, and she completed just two years of the course. When she returned to university, Sybil abandoned medicine and enrolled in a first-year course in music. Eventually she completed a science degree, followed by a secondary teacher training course at Cambridge University, where it is likely that she met the neo-Romantic poet, Rupert Brooke, about whom she spoke frequently (according to Ethel Mann) during her headship at MGHS.

Llewelyn’s teaching career was impressive. She went from science teacher at Penzance to lecturer in science at the Bishop Otter College in West Sussex, a teacher training college for women established in 1873 as a result of the feminist pioneering educationist Louisa Hubbard’s campaign for the acceptance of women teachers. In 1912, she took a year off from teaching to do full-time research for her Master of Science degree. That she could afford to do so suggests that she had some degree of financial independence, perhaps from family money or perhaps even from an inheritance. She continued her teaching career as science mistress at the Girls’ Grammar School in Kirkby Stephen in the Yorkshire Dales and, between 1917 and 1921, she was senior mistress, then headmistress, at the West Suffolk County School, Bury St Edmunds. In 1921 Llewelyn and her mother migrated to Australia, where Llewelyn took up the position of senior mistress in science at Merton Hall, Melbourne Church of England Girls’ Grammar School (CEGGS).

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46 Biographical information on Llewelyn is taken from the Education Gazette and Teachers’ Aid published in January, September and October 1933, her teacher record, record of probate of Miss Llewelyn’s last will and testament, and Register of Professional Officers, VPRS 14440, Unit 1. Ennis Honey is also a significant narrative source on Llewelyn. See Honey, Nymphs and Goddesses.
47 Interview with E. Mann, 4 October 1984.
49 Teacher Record, 24929, Sybil Audrey Augusta Llewelyn, VPRS 14440, Unit 1.
On 6 November 1924, Sybil Llewelyn joined the Victorian Education Department as Inspector of Secondary Schools (Classes ‘B’ and ‘C’) in Biological Sciences, a position she held for eight years. With her appointment she joined an elite group of women in the Department, for there were few opportunities in the 1920s and 1930s for women to move into positions of authority in areas other than domestic science. In 1933 Llewelyn was appointed, on a temporary basis, to the position of headmistress at MGHS. The idea was that she would combine the duty of inspecting the university laboratories with that of headmistress—the Education Department combining two responsibilities and saving a salary. With Julia Flynn, assistant chief inspector of secondary schools, on leave, Llewelyn’s services were needed and Martin Hansen, the Director of Education, suggested in a letter to the Minister of Public Instruction, John Pennington, that Llewelyn could perform both roles efficiently. Her appointment as temporary headmistress unexpectedly triggered a commotion within the state teaching profession and the teacher unions because the Department failed to advertise the position. This failure denied qualified women teachers the opportunity to apply for one of the few positions open to those who aspired to school leadership. The Victorian Teachers’ Union (VTU) requested permission to send deputations to the minister and protested to the Education Department and members of parliament.

There are no records to indicate how Sybil Llewelyn felt about the protests, whether she contemplated standing down to force the Department to observe the official promotion procedure, thus enabling her ‘sisters-in-waiting’ to apply for the position, or whether she quietly valued her good fortune in being given the appointment in the first place. To the state government and the Education Department, the appointment was, to a large extent, a carefully considered money-saving exercise at a time when government expenditure was being slashed across all departments because of the Depression. If Llewelyn was indeed aware that the government wanted to save money by decreasing the number of secondary inspectors, she would have been relieved to be appointed to MGHS because it offered her a pathway into the secondary school system. As a single woman with a mother to support, ensuring the future of her career would have been her first priority. It is also possible that

50 Letter from Martin Hansen to the Minister of Public Instruction, J.W. Pennington, 15 September 1932, VPRS 10249, Unit 150.
51 See VTU to J.W. Pennington, 12 December 1932 and J. Seitz, Director of Education to J. W. Pennington, 8 November 1932, VPRS 10249 Unit 150, 12 December 1932.
52 See VPRS 10249, Unit 150 for the extensive correspondence regarding the position of headmistress at MGHS following Christina Montgomery’s retirement.
53 According to the secretary of the Cambrian Society in May 2005, Llewelyn lived with her mother in Frankston—a substantial distance from MGHS.
the temporary headmistress was regarded by some of her colleagues as unwelcome competition, for she was far more academically qualified and experienced than most of her contemporaries, and, willingly or unwillingly, she had jumped the queue. From the Education Department’s perspective, there were precedents for Llewelyn’s transfer, so it was not as if something new had suddenly been done. The interests of the government bureaucracy and senior women secondary teachers, however, were poles apart. Issues concerning girls’ education, promotion within the Department and the protests from the Council of the Victorian Teachers’ Union about departmental decisions became prominent as the matter, and implications, of Llewelyn’s appointment became a ‘tangled skein’.54

Perhaps the most significant problem with Sybil Llewelyn’s appointment was that its provisional nature suggested that MGHS’s future was anything but secure. After all, closure had already been proposed in 1927 when the school split along gender lines. In parliament, John Lemmon, who had been Minister of Public Instruction between December 1929 and May 1932, suggested that there was indeed some kind of government design behind the decision to ignore policy and appoint Llewelyn on a temporary basis.55 Judging from the parliamentary debates and newspaper reports of the time, lack of money in the Depression years was the real problem, and the reason too for the government’s subsequent decision to increase school fees. Lemmon expressed concern about the effects that those increases would have on enrolments at MGHS, and, significantly, on girls’ secondary education more generally. Another factor was the proposed increase in the number of high schools in the metropolitan area then being discussed in parliament. John Lemmon pointed out that with girls coming from all points of the compass to attend MGHS, its future must be uncertain if the government introduced a new policy that forced a girl to attend the closest high school to her home.56 ‘I take it’, he commented, ‘that the minister will be able to satisfy the committee that there is no intention of taking such actions as would destroy that school. The government has been ominously silent as to its intentions, and there is substantial reason for belief that steps taken … will result in the school … being abolished’.57 The minister’s reply merely increased the uncertainty for the girls’ school, linking Sybil Llewelyn’s temporary appointment to a decision to ‘wait to see’ whether there would be any necessity for a permanent headmistress or whether the MGHS students would have to

54 James McRae, Director of Education, 1 August 1933, VPRS 10249, Unit 150, MGHS File 1933.
56 VPD, 15 December 1932, pp. 3588–89.
57 VPD, 15 December 1932, p. 3589.
be distributed amongst the other high schools in the metropolitan area.\textsuperscript{58} The girls’ school was thus forced to continue on without any assurances as to its future once more.

Where did Sybil Llewelyn position herself amidst the furore over her appointment and the uncertainty about the school’s prospects? What was it like for to be in this position? From former students’ recollections, it appears that she just got on with the job. Once again capital works were undertaken to provide enough rooms for the students and to cater for the academic curriculum through the provision of a science laboratory. Sybil Llewelyn led her school through these changes, albeit with a staff suffering very low morale,\textsuperscript{59} but she was no passive headmistress just biding her time while the position lasted. She had clear ideas about the function of a girls’ high school and she shared them confidently with the school community. At weekly school assemblies she reviewed the function of education with the staff and students, affirming that it was ‘to impart knowledge, to encourage the power of individual thought and to develop a sense of the beautiful and the good to broaden our outlook on life’.\textsuperscript{60} She emphasised, as had her predecessors, that being a Melbourne Girls’ High School girl was a privilege, highlighting the girls’ good fortune in being at this school and reminding them that were not many schools that encouraged girls to study mathematics and sciences.\textsuperscript{61}

Llewelyn continued Christina Montgomery’s practice of knowing about her students’ private worlds, in particular their economic circumstances. On one occasion she became aware that the standard of a student’s work was falling (she was often late for school) and called the student to her office. Realising that the girl’s family was in constant financial difficulty, Llewelyn gave her 25 shillings to purchase a book of concession tickets so that she could travel to school on time and without having to walk to save money. She also gave the girl a letter addressed to the Myer Emporium requesting that the footwear department fit the student with a new pair of school shoes and charge them to Llewelyn’s account.\textsuperscript{62} And then, just before the annual speech night in 1933, Sybil Llewelyn suddenly departed from the school, leaving open the most coveted position in the teaching service. The unexpectedness of Llewelyn’s disappearance generated speculation about the circumstances of her departure, with ill health given as the official reason. It was probably true because

\textsuperscript{58} VPD, 15 December 1932, p. 3594. Such a possibility would surely have affected teacher morale.

\textsuperscript{59} This was due to a combination of displacement to King Street, the poor conditions of the buildings and the continuing protests concerning Llewelyn’s appointment. See Chapter Three, Sites and Struggles.

\textsuperscript{60} Honey, Nymphs and Goddesses, p. 115. See also S. Llewelyn, Principal’s Report, Pallas, 1933.

\textsuperscript{61} See S. Llewelyn, Principal’s Report, Pallas, 1933.

\textsuperscript{62} Honey, Nymphs and Goddesses, p. 133.
her teaching record reveals that illness dogged her throughout the remainder of her teaching career.63

Sybil Llewelyn is remembered with genuine admiration and affection by former students, although few involved in this history were students during her headship. She displayed a great love of science and, in Ennis Honey’s opinion, she was a ‘role model of the modern woman liberated by education’.64 As headmistress, Sybil Llewelyn was self-consciously feminine, somewhat like Daphne Barrett, who became headmistress in 1955. Llewelyn wore beautiful clothes with flowing lines, her hair softly styled up on her head, with an occasional wisp escaping to further soften an already gentle face. She was a keen observer of her students, noticing the things they were interested in, often going to watch and listen to their musical performances, as Ethel Mann recalled with warmth.65 Ultimately, the temporary headmistress was perhaps in the wrong place at the wrong time in terms of her own long-term career prospects. After leaving MGHS, she was appointed headmistress at Fitzroy Domestic Arts School on 13 March 1934, where her performance was again ‘handicapped by her indifferent health’. On 1 January 1944, she was appointed headmistress at J.H. Boyd Domestic College, where she remained until her retirement on 6 September 1949. Her great love away from school was the Cambrian Society with which she was involved as president (unusual in a male-female club) and committee member for many years. She was a private person, however—members of the Cambrian Society who knew her at the time recall that they knew little about her personal life.66 No one can recall Llewelyn returning to Mac.Rob to speak at assemblies, although she did attend the opening of the new school at Albert Park in 1934 and, in the 1950s, a reunion of former principals. The fact that she led the school through a further period of uncertainty in the face of widespread hostility is rarely recognised as significant in the school’s history. Sybil Llewelyn died at her Frankston home, which she had shared with her mother, in 1974. She was 90 years old. Sybil Llewelyn was succeeded by Mary Hutton, a capable woman given the task of uniting the school after the prolonged doubt about its future, and consolidating its reputation in the new premises at Albert Park. Any relief at finally being able to settle into new, purpose-built and permanent premises was short lived, however, as Hutton’s story reveals.

63 Teacher Record, Sybil Audrey Augusta Llewelyn.
64 Honey, Nymphs and Goddesses, p. 115.
65 Interview with Ethel Mann, 4 October 1984.
Mary Hutton

She was a small woman, of fearsome appearance, with blue eyes and flame red hair. [She] told us that after our wanderings we had at last reached the Promised Land.

Ennis Honey 67

Miss Hutton was an important influence on us. She had a deep commitment to learning, and rigorous discipline; a total commitment to the state education system. Under a stern exterior she was a compassionate woman who quietly helped a poor girl with a bursary at her disposal, who wrote a letter when a student’s parent died or the student had outstanding results. She mixed well with parents and would happily partner my ten year-old sister when she accompanied my widowed father to school card nights.

Former pupil and teacher Marjorie Ovenden (Francis) 68

Miss Hutton, our Principal, certainly saw to it that we were surrounded at school by an atmosphere of earnest endeavour leading to success—the mores of the forties simply stated.

Shirley Paine (McConnachie), 2002 69

Mary Hutton—Hairy Mutton, we called her—our tiny but terrifying headmistress, whose every whisper was law, did what she could with moral suasion. She tried to prevent us from going into bobby sox … [and] read sermons about the dangers of lowering standards in these troublous times.

Amirah Inglis (Gust), 1983 70

In June 1933 the Victorian Premier, Sir Stanley Argyle, announced the donation, by Melbourne confectioner Sir Macpherson Robertson, of one hundred thousand pounds to commemorate Victoria’s centenary of foundation—one thousand pounds for each decade. Sir Macpherson Robertson’s philanthropic gesture came at a critical time for the cash-strapped conservative state government and his gift challenged government apathy concerning girls’ further education when he instructed that forty thousand pounds should be spent on a new high school for girls. Mary Hutton was appointed headmistress of the new Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School after the position was finally advertised in October 1933. Her career in the Victorian Education Department already spanned thirty-four years and her appointment reflected a need to bring stability to the school after the politicisation of Sybil Llewelyn’s temporary appointment and the legacy of years of constant uncertainty.

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68 Marjorie Ovenden (Francis), PN, Vol. 10, No. 1, March 2002.
69 Shirley Paine (McConnachie), PN, Vol. 10, No 1, March 2002.
70 Amirah Inglis, 1983, Amirah: An un-Australian Childhood, Heinemann, Melbourne, p. 121.
and agitation about the school’s future. The opening of the new school and the optimism that accompanied it did not signify, however, a brave new world for girls’ education, for there was neither expansion of academic girls’ high schools nor significant change in the expectation that most girls would continue to embrace cheerfully the roles of wife and mother.

Mary Hutton, fourth daughter and youngest child of Colin Ferguson Hutton and Isabel Jane Hutton (Townsend), was born in Hawthorn on 28 October 1883, that remarkable year in which women first graduated from the University of Melbourne. Colin Hutton, of the Hutton’s Hams and Bacons family, was somewhat of an itinerant when it came to employment. He tried his hand at many jobs but found it impossible to settle down. He was once a bacon curer, perhaps a job provided by his brother out of family loyalty, but it did not last. He subsequently described himself as a farmer and, at the time of Mary’s birth, he had become a ‘gentleman’. In his will, his occupation was given as “out of business”, and his death certificate of 1903 listed him as a storeman. Unlike his brothers, Colin Hutton was not able to support his family as was expected of a husband and father, and Isabel Hutton became the dominant figure, the matriarch, in her daughters’ lives. Records show that Colin Hutton was not living with the family after Mary Hutton’s seventh birthday so, for much of her childhood, she was without a father, an experience she had in common with previous Mac.Rob headmistresses. Mary grew up amid the optimism of ‘Marvellous Melbourne’, the city’s new suburbs rapidly expanding with the widespread speculation that accompanied the great Victorian land boom. Isabel Hutton and her daughters moved no fewer than seven times between 1890 and 1901, after the great land boom became the devastating land bust. Victoria was caught up in a period of severe depression in which many livelihoods, savings and fortunes were lost. Isabel, however, steered her family through the slump. Mary’s older sisters were all sent out to work—Daisy

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71 The first women to graduate were Bella Guerin and Lydia Harris. They were awarded Arts degrees.
72 See birth certificate of Alice Annie Hutton, 15 June 1887, No. 13496.
73 See birth certificate of Kate Emily Hutton, 20 September 1869, No. 21417 and Isabel Jane Hutton, 17 January 1882, No. 2686.
74 See birth certificate of Mary Hutton, 28 October 1883, No. 23931.
77 See Jill Roe, 1974, Marvellous Melbourne: The Emergence of a City, Hicks Smith and Sons, Sydney and Graeme Davison, 1978, The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, for excellent analyses of Melbourne’s social and economic history.
as a mantle maker and machinist, Katie a dressmaker and Belle a typist. None of the daughters married and the women stayed together, supporting one another until their deaths.

Mary had advantages not available to her sisters, perhaps because she showed academic promise as a student, and perhaps because by the time she was fourteen the family was in a position to offer her a different future. As a child she attended Manningtree Elementary School in Hawthorn and in 1897, at the tender age of fourteen, she passed the Matriculation examination under the instruction of a private tutor who, according to Hutton biographer Josephine Gray, ‘may have been a visiting matriculation teacher from a small day school’. In 1899 she began her career as a pupil-teacher at Prahran North State School, remaining there until 1904 when she entered the Teacher Training College. In choosing a teaching career Mary Hutton also chose spinsterhood, and, given her parents’ unhappy marriage, she may well have been content to do so.

Mary Hutton was an exceptional student, winning university and training college prizes as she completed her Bachelor and Master of Arts degrees and a Diploma of Education. She, like her predecessors at Mac.Rob, was well credentialled and highly qualified. In 1908, after ‘doing her time’ in country schools, Hutton was appointed to the Melbourne Continuation School as a junior mistress. By 1923 she had reached the position of senior mistress Grade 1. Although this may seem a long time coming for promotion, it was quite a rapid rise for a woman in the Victorian Education Department in the early twentieth century. With this promotion, however, Hutton reached the top of her profession, and, as a woman, she had nowhere to go, even with her exceptional academic record. All of the state high school headships at that time were held by men. This situation may well have influenced Hutton’s decision to take a year’s leave in 1924 to travel abroad with teaching colleague Dorothy MacKay, a former MCS student and close, life-long companion. Women teachers had travelled abroad in the past, as tourists and as exchange teachers (although there is no evidence that this was the case with Hutton and MacKay), and those who could afford to travel often did so with the thought of seeing for themselves the places they talked about in the subjects they taught at school. Hutton and MacKay did visit some schools in


79 Teacher record of Mary Hutton, VPRS 13718.
the London area and attended the League of the Empire Triennial Imperial Education Conference where they met other high school teachers.\textsuperscript{80} The friends travelled throughout Western Europe mixing educational conferences with sightseeing, theatre and garden parties.\textsuperscript{81} When she returned to Melbourne, Hutton was a woman in her early forties, a well-educated and experienced teacher who had reached the highest position possible in the Department other than a principalship, and with another twenty years to think about in terms of her career. She spent a short term at Coburg High School before returning to MHS in 1925. In 1927 Hutton was appointed headmistress of the Collingwood Girls’ School, a domestic arts college, and she took opportunities to further her career as they presented themselves.\textsuperscript{82} In 1928, for example, she applied to join the ranks of school inspectors but was unsuccessful. This was a fortunate outcome in hindsight, for, as the experience of Sybil Llewelyn illustrates, school inspector positions became vulnerable to the massive cost cutting that occurred with the onset of the Great Depression.\textsuperscript{83}

**Hutton at Mac.Rob**

*The recent depression has caused many to grasp the first opportunity for employment offered [but], if difficult times recur, the unqualified will probably be the first to suffer.*

Mary Hutton, *Pallas*, 1936

*The presence of your daughters in this school proves that you are interested in education.*

Mary Hutton, *Pallas*, 1938

As headmistress at Mac.Rob, Mary Hutton showed herself to be a confident leader with strong opinions about education, girls and society, and she took advantage of every opportunity to disseminate her views. She led by example. From a student’s perspective, there was no messing about with this headmistress and, like her predecessors, Hutton was assiduous in her expectation of excellence, not just for its own sake, but because she

\textsuperscript{80} See Gray, ‘Mary Hutton—A Biography’, p. 77.

\textsuperscript{81} Gray, ‘Mary Hutton—A Biography’, p. 77.

\textsuperscript{82} Teacher record of Mary Hutton, VPRS 13718.

\textsuperscript{83} It is also feasible that the Director of Education, Martin Hansen (1928–1932), former chief inspector of secondary schools in 1914, prioritised men over women for inspectorial positions—except for domestic arts subjects. Hansen’s view of education differed from that of Frank Tate. Hansen believed that secondary education was the key that opened up the world of the higher professions, and this was a man’s world at that time. Hansen’s views on women in education were significantly mediated by his views on secondary education. See Report of the Minister of Public Instruction 1917–18, Appendix B, p. 14.
believed that each person should aim high in all aspects of life.\textsuperscript{84} For Mary Hutton, raised as a Methodist, it was as if every person was born with a duty to develop deeply moral, cultured, creative, self-disciplined and compassionate qualities that would help realise his or her potential.\textsuperscript{85} There was no doubting her ability to head a state high school. As former student Wynne Higgins reflected, she might have looked like a lovely, motherly granny to some, ‘but she wasn’t … she was the principal’.\textsuperscript{86} Hutton’s own religious convictions meant that she saw a hole in the finger of a glove as a disgrace, whereas a mend was a sign of a virtuous schoolgirl. She expected to be obeyed, and stressed the value and place of the school motto, potens sui (self-control or self-mastery), in the lives of the girls as well as in the lives of people generally. She had definite ideas about the role of women in society and encouraged her students to consider a professional career at a time when women were expected to marry and have children to help their youthful nation to ‘populate or perish’.\textsuperscript{87} Mary Hutton was a prolific fighter for equal opportunities for girls, arguing in the forums open to her that female was not a synonym for inadequate.\textsuperscript{88}

Mary Hutton’s headship took place during a period of significant change in educational philosophy and practice and, through her regular reports and speeches, she set out to educate the students and their parents about educational and social matters. She saw it as a responsibility of headship to do so. In her reports to parents, she placed the school and its community within the broader context of what was happening in the world to demonstrate the importance of education in life.\textsuperscript{89} In 1935 she advocated greater autonomy for schools in organisation, teaching methods and curriculum, arguing that experimentation should be encouraged. ‘Though we are a system’, she declared at the annual speech night, ‘we need not be systematised’.\textsuperscript{90} Following her attendance in Melbourne at one of a series of education conferences (organised by the New Education Fellowship) held throughout Australia in 1937, Hutton explained that the new Educational Reform Association (ERA) was advocating a national system of education, a system that would, she argued, be a significant improvement on the individualistic and often selfish single state systems that

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\textsuperscript{84} See for example, Hutton’s regular reports in the \textit{Pallas} magazine where she publicly shared her views on life, education and her expectations of education and her students.  
\textsuperscript{85} Mary Hutton, \textit{Pallas}, December 1938, p.2.  
\textsuperscript{86} Interview with Wynne Higgins, 28 August 2003.  
\textsuperscript{87} With immigration decreasing during the Depression and then ceasing in Australia in September 1939 with the outbreak of World War Two, ‘populate or perish’ became a mantra for national security and survival. Women were under immense pressure as civic-minded citizens to have children to secure Australia’s future.  
\textsuperscript{88} See Principal’s Reports (Mary Hutton) and \textit{Pallas} magazines 1934–48.  
\textsuperscript{89} M. Hutton, Annual Report, Speech Night 1935. Unit 12, MGHS Archive.  
\textsuperscript{90} M. Hutton, Annual Report, Speech Night, 1935. MGHS Archive, Unit 16. 
\end{footnotesize}
existed at the time. She reminded parents that if reform in education was to occur it would only happen ‘through the force of an educated public opinion’.  

For Mary Hutton, a fervent progressivist with a deep interest in new educational theories, education and the child were intrinsically linked to social transformation. In her 1937 speech night address, she referred her audience somewhat provocatively to the example of the leaders of Europe’s totalitarian states, who had prioritised education in training and educating their young. ‘On the training and education of the young the future of our race depends’, the headmistress said. ‘A short-sighted economy’, she added, ‘may result in waste and disaster in the coming years’. Hutton consistently stressed the idea that girls should have educational opportunities, for the national good and for their own personal development. She also believed that there should be a clear purpose to education, and that curriculum and teaching methods should reflect that purpose. When the spectre of war loomed yet again in 1938, she advised that, in these ‘troubulous times’, the efficiency of systems of government under which people lived needed to be examined: that educational methods, as well as the aims of the state concerning education, needed careful scrutiny. 

Mary Hutton continued to educate and inform her school community throughout her term as headmistress, and her influence on her students is perhaps evident in their writing in *Pallas* throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Students wrote about a wide range of issues—political, cultural, social and economic; these were not subject matters traditionally engaged in by budding young ladies. They spoke freely, confidently and enthusiastically, as young women with particular ways of understanding what was going on in the world and ideas about how the world should be. Unlike her predecessors, Mary Hutton questioned the use of tradition to inspire the young, although she upheld and promoted Mac.Rob’s own traditions. For her, tradition for tradition’s sake privileged one group within society as omniscient and infallible, which in turn denied a much-needed spirit of free and critical enquiry in new generations. Hutton was a quite modern woman in the sense that she embraced the need for change and reform as a central element of a society that she thought should move forward rather than stagnate in the grip of a past that had brought the world to the brink of war yet again. 

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91 The conference sessions were organised by the New Educational Fellowship and the theme was, ‘Education for Complete Living: The Challenge for Today’. The sessions were led by international progressive educationists. See Marjorie Theobald and Rosslyn McCarthy (eds), 1993, *Melbourne Girls Grammar Centenary Essays, 1893–1993*, Hyland House, Melbourne GGS, p. 92. 
92 M. Hutton, Annual Report, Speech Night 1939, MGHS Archive, Unit 16. 
93 M. Hutton, Annual Report, 1938, MGHS Archive, Unit 16. 
94 M. Hutton, Annual Report, 1937, MGHS Archive, Unit 16.
With all her passionate attention to educational and social issues, Mary Hutton had to contend also with the less glamorous side of headship—the mundane reality of being part of a somewhat sluggish and often self-important education bureaucracy. Her experience of this bureaucracy from her days at the Collingwood Domestic Arts School set her up well to face the problems that became apparent not long after the new school opened. A range of minor and major structural defects appeared throughout the buildings, as we have seen in chapter two, resulting in a mass of paperwork as requests for repairs and maintenance passed between the school, the Education Department and the public works office. The Department, perhaps convinced that a brand new building could not possibly have immediate maintenance issues, argued that because the building had not long been completed further expenditure could not be a priority. The Department informed Mary Hutton that there were a large number of more urgent works awaiting its attention and it was not prepared to make any allowance for expenditure on the building at that time. Miss Hutton simply continued her correspondence.

In 1939 the Second World War broke out and, with rationing and a general shortage of clothing, some girls found it difficult to maintain a full school uniform. Mary Hutton modified the dress code to allow ankle socks to replace stockings but, as the war began to affect the lives of those on the home front, she also pressed the school community to take an active part in the war effort. She placed Frances (Fanny) Barkman in charge of war relief, an astute choice, for the Belgian-born Barkman had been assisting European refugees, particularly Jewish refugees, to settle safely in Australia for some time. In 1942 the girls and teachers were forced to make a more substantial sacrifice when they were evicted from their school after it was requisitioned by the Australian government as the temporary headquarters of the US army in Australia. Within days of being ordered out, Mary Hutton organised the transfer of the girls, staff and resources to East Camberwell Girls’ School (Mangarra Road), Brighton Road State School and University High School (UHS). The ramifications of the move, including physical separation from Albert Park and from the entire school community, and the logistics of physically moving to other schools and then working effectively as a school at these sites, were not as clear to former student, Beryl Thomson (Morter) in 1942 as it was years later: ‘In looking back’, she wrote in 1996, …

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95 See correspondence file with Education Department for letters that passed between the Department and the school principals and headmistresses. VPRS 10249, 10274.
96 See MGHS Archive for Hutton’s prolific correspondence with the Department.
97 Joan Collishaw, PN, September 1991, p. 5. Collishaw’s memory of Frances Barkman was representative of the memories of other former students. Barkman was a well-known Jewish activist, particularly during her time at Mac.Rob, and she was an inspiring, confident woman according to those who knew her.
'I realise what a huge undertaking the re-location of a large school like Mac.Rob was'. It is difficult to imagine what it was like for Mary Hutton to head a school so geographically divided, but she went from site to site frequently to maintain contact with her teachers and students; she, in fact, owed a great deal to her teaching staff, who led by example in managing the division of the school as well as they did.

When the Bowen Street site was vacated by the US army and, later, the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) in 1943, Mary Hutton prepared to organise the girls’ return to their school, but, once again, the idea that the girls could be split up among existing and planned high schools was tossed around in bureaucratic circles. A committed unionist, Hutton deftly drew on the support of the teachers’ union to effect the return of the school property to its educational purpose. This achieved, she turned her attention to repairing the damaged buildings and grounds. She was, as usual, indefatigable, and, ‘Dear Sir, I have the honour to request…’ must have become a monotonous routine as she pressed to have air raid trenches that had been dug in the playing area filled in and classrooms, many gutted of their fixtures and fittings, returned to their former state. In 1945, Mary Hutton was formally appointed principal of Mac.Rob after the headmistress position was upgraded by the Department. She was, then, the first female principal of a Victorian state secondary school. She was awarded the position above Alice Hoy, whose contribution to education in Victoria was later memorialised in the naming of a building at the University of Melbourne. Hutton believed teaching to be one of the most noble of professions and encouraged parents to support their daughters if they felt called to this ‘highest service’. As Frank Tate had sought the finest teachers to staff the Continuation School, so Mary Hutton argued that the teaching profession needed the best young women. How else could the state’s youth be guaranteed an excellent education?

How was Hutton received by her students? How did they feel about her? It would be satisfying to glamorise her work, suggesting that she was a role model for girls in the 1930s and 1940s, but it is equally likely that girls were put off by the pressures of Hutton’s rigour and exacting expectations. A spinster headmistress who drew on her predecessors and contemporaries as models, Hutton was held in awe by her students (and most of her staff) rather than loved. But then again, she did not seek to be loved, and may perhaps even have

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99 Focus Group Canterbury, 31 August 2003. This group of ten former students from the Hutton era provided a rich context for explaining Hutton as they deconstructed each other’s memories of their school days at one of their regular get-togethers.
considered this a weakness. Ultimately, experiences of her, along with their own life trajectories, shape former students’ memories and feelings about their former headmistress and principal. One woman recalled how the headmistress cried when informed that war had been declared in 1939, regretting deeply that she was not at school on that fateful day to be near her students and staff. She was, at the time, in Sydney on a trip with a group of girls and teachers, and pictures of her there, sitting on the sand in her dark suit and hat, reveal a softer side to her in a less formal setting. Something that stood out for Joan Collishaw is that Mary Hutton seemed to know all of her students by name. According to Joan, ‘She often spoke to us on our own (and) she could recall my name at a chance meeting many years later’. Wynne Higgins remembered her as ‘the power on the throne,’ whilst Elaine Mitchell recalled most strongly the team of Hutton and Gainfort, in which ‘Miss Hutton made the bullets and Miss Gainfort fired them.’ According to Elaine, Mary Hutton’s presence on the number 64 tram also stymied any plans a girl might have to flirt with boys, her chaperonage assuring the good reputation of her students and that of the school.

There are former students who do not recall Hutton with either warmth or joy, as Josephine Gray reveals in her 2002 doctoral thesis on Hutton’s working life. According to Gray, former students found Mary Hutton to be a hard disciplinarian who sought above all to protect the school’s reputation. This meant, according to the women Gray interviewed, that any girl thought to have let the school down, particularly in public, would face a fearsome and often sarcastic Hutton. Gray’s interviews suggest that Mary Hutton may have lacked empathy with some students whose families were struggling financially, preferring to instil in all a sense of obligation and responsibility despite material circumstances. Gray refers to one student, Joan, whose memories of Mary Hutton of as a ‘cold, ordinary, uncharismatic headmistress’ are mediated by her surprise that a woman from a domestic arts school could be appointed to Mac.Rob. But there were no other pathways to headship available to women at the time. State high schools were headed by men.

Mary Hutton retired as principal in 1948 but she returned to the school to replace her successor, Rubina Gainfort, for six weeks during the first term of 1949 when Gainfort became ill with pneumonia. According to one student in Pallas 1950, the girls were glad when Gainfort returned: ‘We were very happy to know Miss Hutton was with us again, but,

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102 Gray, ‘Biography of Mary Hutton’, pp. 218–20. This kind of feeling was also evident in Daphne Barrett’s experience of replacing Rubina Gainfort as principal in 1955. There was a certain snobbery at Barrett’s time as headmistress of a domestic arts school.
without fear of misunderstanding, we are glad indeed that Miss Gainfort was able to come
back at the beginning of second term.” Mary Hutton returned to MGHS on a number of
occasions between 1951 and 1953, before finally leaving the service in January 1954.
During her teaching service Hutton had worked hard to improve pay and promotion for
women in the Education Department. She had served on the Schools Board and the
Committee of Convocation of the University of Melbourne. She had also been an
executive–member of the High Schools’ Teachers’ Association and a council–member of
the Victorian Teachers’ Union. Her retirement years were filled with the enjoyment of
tavel (with her sisters and her life-long friend, Dorothy MacKay), the arts, and her
energetic involvement in church activities. Gray’s thesis traces these years carefully.
Mary Hutton died on 21 December 1964 after collapsing on the steps of a Melbourne
concert hall following a musical performance she had attended with friends. She was
eighty-one years old, rather young in comparison to other female heads of Mac.Rob at their
daths.

Rubina Gainfort

The most shocking thing that she had to contend with was when one of the
girls posed for ‘People’ magazine.

Former student, Lois Bryson (Hobson)

I didn’t have a great deal to do with Miss Gainfort, but she was a most
powerful person and tall. She had a hairstyle which looked marvellous on
her. She was a most queenly-looking person. She was always very quiet. I
never heard her raise her voice. She was very, very striking. I admired her
very much.

Former student, Wynne Higgins

I was lucky arriving at Mac.Rob for the last years of Miss Gainfort’s regime.
She told us how to prepare ourselves for roles of high achievement and
responsibility until her admonitions became tiresome. But she also created
an environment in which that preparation could take place.

Former student, Beatrice Faust (Fennessy)  

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103 Pallas, December 1950.
In a world where everything that is worthwhile is struggling for its existence, where things are not viewed in their true perspective, students who are preparing for their future may be led into accepting false standards ... But in the post-war world it will be only those with something of positive value to offer who will find a place in the re-organisation.

Rubina Gainfort at the ‘Emily Mac’.  

A school worthy of ideals does not cater for academic instruction only. If accepted and used to advantage, the complete life in a school can do far more towards developing personality and character than the work done in the classroom.

Rubina Gainfort, address to students

Mary Hutton’s successor, Rubina Hope Gainfort, was born in Clifton Hill on 7 April 1890. She was the second daughter of Edward Gainfort and his wife, Sarah née Cordy. Rubina’s older sister, Winifred, would play a significant yet largely invisible role in Rubina’s far more public life. Edward also had another daughter, Edna, from a previous marriage, but there is no indication that Rubina and Winifred had any relationship with her as children. Edna Gainfort did not approve of her father’s marriage to Sarah, who had been the family’s housekeeper, and consequently left the family home. Rubina and Winifred began their schooling together at Gold Street State School, Clifton Hill, and, on their first day, Rubina recalled almost ninety years later, she was placed ahead of Winifred in the top group of the preparatory level, even though she was a year younger. Very different sisters, Rubina would always stand out academically and Winifred (Win) laboured quietly.

Sarah Gainfort was overprotective of her daughters and kept them under tight supervision. She appears to have been concerned about the family’s standing within the local community, perhaps because of her own social position before marrying Edward. She insisted that the girls come home for lunch each day, limiting their contact with neighbourhood children. She even timed their return to school after lunch, refusing to allow them to move until after the second bell had rung. By her own admission, Rubina was closer to her father than to her mother, and she acknowledged that he spoilt her. The mother-daughter relationship was more often than not a test of wills, with the quiet, retiring

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108 Rubina Gainfort, principal’s address to students, date unknown, MGHS Archive.
109 Rubina did make a provision in her will for Edna Gainfort Williams. John Williams, who interviewed Rubina in 1984, is a descendant of Rubina’s half-sister.
Edward in the middle trying to appease both wife and daughter. According to Rubina in an interview with relative John Williams in 1984, her father generally gave in to the girls whereas Sarah was unbending. Edward died in 1901 and Sarah took in boarders to make ends meet. To free up bedrooms, mother and daughters slept together in the sitting room. Edward’s death hit Rubina hard, for she loved him dearly and his absence meant that she now had to stand up to her mother alone. Yet even at the age of eleven Rubina was determined, an independent thinker and a strong character, perhaps inheriting some of her mother’s qualities—a possibility she acknowledged just before she died. One of the most critical moments of her childhood, insisted Rubina to her great-nephew John Williams, was the moment she realised that to make her own way in life she had to get out of home and earn money, a realisation that gave her the motivation she needed to do just that.

At the end of sixth grade, Rubina won a government scholarship to the prestigious and progressive South Melbourne College, run by the eminent poet and teacher, John B. O’Hara. This school enjoyed an excellent record in the matriculation examinations and Rubina was off to a good start. She relinquished the scholarship, however, at the end of her first year on the advice of her former sixth grade teacher, and enrolled in the newly opened Melbourne Continuation School. From there she had a clear run to a teaching qualification and independence. Rubina completed the junior public course in two years and was one of a dozen or so students, including three girls, invited by Joseph Hocking to sit a school-based test of their ability to pass the senior public examination. This was a significant (but not entirely unexpected) change of direction for the Continuation School as its original mandate was to educate potential teachers to the junior public year, and then send them on to the teacher training college following a year’s apprenticeship in a school as a junior teacher.

When the first students passed the 1907 junior public examinations with flying colours, Joseph Hocking and Frank Tate saw the potential for some students to qualify for entrance to the University, and Hocking was thus permitted to incorporate the senior public course

\[112\] Interview with Rubina Gainfort, 1984.
\[113\] Interview with Rubina Gainfort, 1984.
\[114\] Interview with Rubina Gainfort, 1984.
\[115\] For information on John Bernard O’Hara (1862–1927) and his school see Margaret M. Pawsey, ‘O’Hara, John Bernard (1862–1927)’, in G. Serle, (ed), Australian Dictionary of Biography, Vol. 11, 1891–1939, pp. 72–73. See also Argus 1–2 April 1927, Herald 31 March 1927, and Age 1 April 1927 for notices upon O’Hara’s death.
\[116\] Interview with Rubina Gainfort, 1984. See also MCS Examination Book 1905, MGHS Archive for results.
into the school curriculum. Rubina Gainfort was one of the lucky pupils invited to stay on, and she recalled the senior public year as a wonderful time. It was certainly a groundbreaking opportunity for girls fortunate enough to be at ‘high school’. Continuing her schooling came at a price for Gainfort’s family, however, as Sarah decided that she had to sell the Clifton Hill family home to fund her daughter’s education. Winifred had left school when she turned fourteen, as most girls did, and her meagre seamstress’s wage supplemented the family income to a degree, but it was not enough. Just as the Robertson, Montgomery and Hutton women supported each other, the Gainfort women made significant sacrifices for Rubina when it was clear that she was academically gifted. Rubina acknowledged her indebtedness to her mother and sister, and she began to send money home to her family from the moment she received her first salary. There was a deep loyalty between these three women, regardless of their personalities, and it is not so difficult to imagine the sense of empowerment that Sarah, and Winifred following Sarah’s death, experienced as they put all of their efforts into supporting Rubina. There is no sense of sacrifice or resentment on their part; on the contrary, these women made deliberate choices at certain times of their lives to support a gifted, strong daughter and sister. After completing her senior public examinations, Rubina returned to Gold Street state school for a year as a junior teacher before entering the Teacher Training College. Two years later, she was qualified to teach and immediately applied for a country posting. Country postings, widely regarded as a kind of ‘proving-ground’ apprenticeship for inexperienced teachers, were not popular with the majority of young, single, and newly qualified female teachers at that time. Rubina, however, wanted her independence and a country posting provided just that.

Because she was prepared to travel, Rubina was posted widely throughout Victoria. She had stints at Goorambat, Merino, Chilwell, Kyabram, Echuca (where she taught thirty-three periods of Algebra, Geometry and Geography), Bairnsdale and Ferntree Gully, and, like others before and after her, she sometimes had to live in the local hotel during short teaching spells when suitable board could not be found. For fourteen years she sent money home to Sarah and Winifred, who were renting a house in Northcote, but in January 1925 she returned to Melbourne as senior mistress at Williamstown Girls’ High School, a

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118 Interview with Rubina Gainfort, 1984.
121 Teacher record of Rubina Hope Gainfort, VPRS 13718.
new domestic arts school, and the three women moved into a house together in Camberwell. In 1927 Rubina was posted to Geelong and two years later to her old school, by then known as Melbourne Girls’ High School. It must have been difficult for her to see the appalling conditions as the buildings fell further and further into serious disrepair. When the school was relocated to Government House in 1931, Rubina Gainfort was Christina Montgomery’s mainstay in managing the transfer, and many former students remember and admire her exceptional organisational ability, particularly as she was so visible in their daily lives.

The move to Government House offered the Gainfort women the opportunity to live on the premises in a divided twelve-roomed bungalow shared with another teacher, Olive T. Smith. These living arrangements stayed in the memories of many former students, perhaps because it was unusual to have state school teachers and their families residing on school grounds. Gainfort suffered ill health in 1932 and in September she took two months leave. She returned to school, perhaps motivated by a deep sense of loyalty, in time to help her headmistress as examinations and the annual speech night loomed. In remembering the move to West Melbourne in 1933, Gainfort admitted that she thought at the time that it would be the end of Melbourne Girls’ High School. No wonder morale was low when Sybil Llewelyn took over as head. Rubina moved to University High School (UHS) in 1940 as vice-principal, a position in which she could combine teaching (mathematics of course) with the administrative work she loved, and, as she later divulged, ‘I was interested in teaching at UHS because I was quite glad to get boys back again; of course the boys have a different attitude and I always enjoyed teaching boys’.

In 1942 the Director of Education, John Seitz, appointed Rubina Gainfort principal at the Emily McPherson College of Domestic Economy (1906–1979) but she did not want to go. According to Elizabeth Brown, her friend and professional colleague, the Director wanted Gainfort to go to ‘Emily Mac’ to “bring it together” because things were in a bit of a mess.

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122 In 1929 Williamstown GHS had two students doing the Leaving Honours year whereas MGHS had twenty. MHS had fifty. As an academic school, Mac.Rob enjoyed a higher retention rate to Matriculation (now VCE) than the girls’ high schools where most girls left after Intermediate, with s few going on to Leaving. See A. Max Badcock, ‘The Secondary Division, Book Five’, in L.J. Blake (ed), Vision and Realisation, Vol. 1, for a range of figures on state high schools and retention rates, Education Department of Victoria, Melbourne, pp. 435–590.
there.\textsuperscript{125} Gainfort went, but only because, as she told Elizabeth Brown bitterly, Seitz warned her to “go or get out”.\textsuperscript{126} In 1945, tired of being at the domestic arts school, Rubina requested a transfer to Mac.Rob. She had achieved important reforms at the ‘Emily Mac’, including professionalising some of the courses of study, and bringing in qualified staff, but she was unhappy there, and not entirely welcome to the staff.\textsuperscript{127} It would have been difficult for a woman of Rubina Gainfort’s intellect and academic experience to be accepted by everyone at the domestic arts school, for she represented the opposite of what ‘Emily Mac’ existed for. The position of vice-principal at Mac.Rob happened to be advertised at the end of that year and Rubina Gainfort was the successful applicant. It does not take much to imagine her feelings of delight in being back in a first-class academic environment and working in an administrative role supporting Mary Hutton.

In 1949 Hutton retired, and she encouraged her deputy to apply for the position. As principal, Gainfort did not isolate herself in the administration area as heads had tended to do in the past. Former student Lois Bryson (Hobson) found her visibility and presence quite remarkable in comparison with the principal at Bryson’s previous high school.\textsuperscript{128} Both Bryson and Jessie Clark (Tilbrook) remember Gainfort teaching mathematics—algebra, geometry and trigonometry—two or three times a week in addition to carrying out her duties as principal, and, according to Jessie, she demanded very high standards (mostly welcomed and valued) of herself, her staff and her students.\textsuperscript{129} In this she followed the path of her predecessors, expecting every student and teacher to do their best and live up to the school’s reputation for personal discipline and academic excellence. Education was still a privilege for most girls and privilege brought with it responsibilities.

There are students who remember Rubina Gainfort as a principal they feared, although the dread women speak of in later life had more to do with the head’s position of authority than their actual experience of Gainfort on a day-to-day basis. A few stories of girls’ experiences of her illustrate more precisely how she was understood and received as head. Gainfort was a no-nonsense principal according to Suzanne Russell (Westcott), who went on to become president of the MGHS school council in 1991. Suzanne had been asked to leave Shelford private school because she was not the right kind of girl—possessing a confident,
questioning approach to learning that could be intimidating for teachers. Suzanne applied to enter Mac.Rob but Gainfort refused to accept her, perhaps unsure about her suitability after her forced departure from her previous school. Not to be dissuaded, Suzanne managed to enrol as a Legacy child, for her father, a rear gunner in the air force, had been killed in action in World War II. Even with this victory Suzanne said that she knew she had met her match in Miss Gainfort, and she settled in to her new school, happily accepting that she would have to do her best to justify her presence. This suited Suzanne and she thrived in the Mac.Rob environment.130

Rose Porter remembered Gainfort as many a school girl might remember her principal—she was terrified of her, ‘although’, Rose added, ‘she was really quite nice. I think that it might have been her manner. She would fix you with her eyes’.131 Another former student, Lilian Efron, felt a similar sense of awe of her principal. For Lilian, there was a natural association between headmistress and ‘crime and punishment’.132 To be told to report to Miss Gainfort’s office was a dreaded experience and one generally associated with a serious infringement of school rules. In calling to mind Rubina Gainfort decades later, Lilian explains:

There was authority there. We could be sent to Miss Gainfort and be in serious trouble, and that was a fear. Being sent to the headmistress was a fear. But I think we sensed that she was a really decent person dedicated to the education and well being of her students.133

Lois Bryson (Hobson) also remembers a visit to Gainfort’s office, but for her it was a supportive, calming experience. According to Lois, ‘She would bring students in to talk about things that were a worry to the school, like a student riding her bike the wrong way down a street, but there was never a sense of anything being out of control’.134 Lois (who was at Mac.Rob for the matriculation year only) concludes that the length of time a girl had been at Mac.Rob affected how that girl might see her principal.135 June Stone (Seyfort) recalls Rubina Gainfort as a woman with a no-nonsense, serious manner: a principal who did not procrastinate and who expected her students to be the same. June remembers an

130 Interview with Suzanne Russell (Westcott), September 2004.
131 Interview with Rose Porter, 10 October 2002.
133 Interview with Lilian Efron, 11 September 2002.
134 Interview with Lois Bryson (Hobson), 23 August 2003.
135 Interview with Lois Bryson (Hobson), 23 August 2003.
occasion in the post-war period when Gainfort decided that it was time to reintroduce German as a subject after it had been dropped from the curriculum at the beginning of the war. At a morning assembly she asked for volunteers, but no-one wanted to do it. Following a quiet pause and with no takers, Gainfort took the lead and announced herself the names of those girls who would be taking German—alphabetically. According to June, ‘Barbara Anderson was named first and then some of her mates joined her’. Rubina Gainfort had her German language class.

Like the women who had headed Mac.Rob before her, Rubina Gainfort was familiar with the private circumstances of her students, and quite a few recall her speaking to parents, encouraging them to keep their daughters in school to complete their education. Jessie Clark (Tilbrook) feels a deep sense of gratitude towards her principal for interceding with her parents to recommend that she remain at school for the final year. According to this former student, she did not want to upset her parents once they had made a decision about her future, and she knew her mother needed her support on the family farm; but Miss Gainfort and her mother nevertheless agreed that Jesse should stay to matriculate. Former students with similar stories believe that their lives were very different because of Gainfort’s interest in them. Not all girls were ‘saved’ from having to leave school early, but those who were associate the education they received at MGHS with the subsequent direction of their lives.

Rubina Gainfort was principal during a time of immense political and social upheaval caused by the advent of the Cold War in the late 1940s. State school teachers were under intense scrutiny for their politics, which it was feared, would affect their students’ education. One of Gainfort’s teaching colleagues, Doris McRae, also a former Continuation School pupil, came under attack for allegedly teaching communist values in social studies lessons at Flemington Girls’ School in 1947 where she was headmistress. At the same time at Mac.Rob, Mary Lazarus, who is remembered so affectionately as an inspiring teacher by former students, was a member of the Communist Party while serving on the VTU council. Perhaps the intense surveillance of the teaching profession during the anti-communist era of the Cold War, detailed by Griffin in her thesis on Doris McRae, was an

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136 Interview with June Stone (Seyfort), 21 January 2005.
137 Interview with Jessie Clark (Tilbrook), 23 August 2003.
138 See Griffin, ‘A Biography of Doris McRae’. Griffin’s thesis is an immensely rich source of context and information about Victorian women and politics, women in the VTU and in the Education Department, and the effects of the Cold War mentality on teachers in Victoria throughout the twentieth century, particularly women like McRae who did not neatly fit prevailing ideas of the ideal woman teacher.
added pressure for Rubina Gainfort as principal of Melbourne’s most prestigious academic state high school for girls—something that her students may not have been aware of at the time.\textsuperscript{139}

The year after Rubina Gainfort was appointed principal at Mac.Rob, her mother died. Rubina and Winifred continued to live together until ‘Win’s’ death in 1968, at the age of 79. Gainfort later acknowledged that Winifred was a crucial figure in her life as she kept house and supported her always, enabling her to have her career and to follow it with passion and determination.\textsuperscript{140} Rubina Gainfort maintained strong links with Mac.Rob after she retired in 1955 and, on her 90th birthday, members of the Palladians association were there to help her celebrate. She enjoyed attending speech nights and various school functions until she moved to a hostel for the aged in Camberwell where she died on 11 November 1985.

Gainfort’s successor is one of the most contentiously remembered of principals and her story is significant in the context of the massive social transformation that began in the late 1950s and reached its peak in the following decade.

\textbf{Daphne Barrett}

\textit{The 1950s were a squeaky clean era with everything buttoned down and fine tuned and set. People spent the 50s re-establishing their lives after the war. The 50s were a huge rush of restlessness awaiting triggers which the 60s would provide.}\textsuperscript{141}

\textit{The secondary education to which the broader populace would achieve access in the 1950s and 1960s became a rather different institution from that provided for the privileged few in the decades before the Second World War.}\textsuperscript{142}

\textit{She was a social butterfly and let us hope that soon she flutters by.}

Comment of former student remembered by Susan Sherson (Terry) to P. Parker

\textsuperscript{139} Griffin, ‘A Biography of Doris McRae’.
\textsuperscript{140} Interview with Rubina Gainfort, 1984.
\textsuperscript{141} Brian Matthews speaking at ‘Go! Melbourne in the 1960s’, La Trobe and Monash Universities combined conference, 2–4 October 2002.
Miss Barrett brought with her the gift of gentle but firm persuasion with her attention to tone and a conservative guardianship of the school’s reputation for quality.

Former Chief Inspector of Secondary Schools, T.J. Ford

As well as aloofness there was humour and wit. I learnt to appreciate this when, in trouble for persistent late coming, I was ‘sent to the principal’. After considering my case, she declared that, as it was her opinion that I was “constitutionally incapable of being on time”, she was providing me with a late pass, not as a permanent concession, but to try to break the pattern.

Former student, Judith Cordingley

Daphne Lillias Barrett was a very attractive woman it has been said, a striking, intelligent and charming woman, a woman people noticed. The contrasts in memories of her, however, are remarkable. She is recalled by many as a slave to convention, who expected her students and staff to be the same, and by others as an inspiring, strong and wise intellectual, and, according to Susan Sherson (Terry), who opened doors to students and supported them as young women in the making.

It is not widely known that Daphne Barrett was the first woman to apply for the position of principal of MHS, the boys’ school, a remarkable decision in the context of the times. In the early 1950s after the male and female classified rolls were finally combined, Barrett gained seniority. When the principalship at MHS became vacant, she applied, but was unsuccessful. The prestigious position went to Brigadier George Langley, the school’s preferred contender. Perhaps the teacher tribunal quietly fudged the rules in order to ‘save the day’ for the boys’ school. It was not the first time rules were changed midstream, nor was it the last. Perhaps, too, Barrett’s application was not taken seriously—a woman seeking to be principal of a prestigious boys’ school would have been quite a surprise at the time. Barrett does not appear to have appealed the decision and perhaps she felt that she had made her point.

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143 T.J. Ford, 13 October 1983, MGHS archives, Unit 23.
144 Judith Cordingley, Letter to Pauline Parker, MGHS Archive, 29 November 2004. This was not a permanent cure for Judith, but it did help and, as Judith notes, ‘It taught me that often more benefit is obtained by offering assistance rather than opposition and punishment’.
Daphne Barrett’s teaching record paints a picture of a bright, painstaking and energetic teacher, with good general knowledge and skill in inspiring interest in learning among her students. She taught at Daylesford, Geelong, Mildura, Stawell and Colac and she received glowing reports at each school. She shone, however, as a headmistress, according to her teacher record. Appointed headmistress at Fitzroy Girls’ School in February 1946, she was praised for her ability to establish what was then a new school. In 1950 she was appointed headmistress at the J.H. Boys Domestic College and her ability to handle the ‘special problems of her school’ was specifically mentioned on her record that year. Whatever problems the school had, Barrett was recognised as bringing the staff, school council, students and parents together as a happy and effective school community. Her inspector in 1954 noted that she was an outstanding headmistress.

When Daphne Barrett became principal at MGHS in 1955 she faced a groundswell of rejection, particularly from some who had been there a long time. After all, she was not an ‘old girl’ with the historical and emotional links to the school her predecessors had enjoyed. Another explanation for the hostility towards her lies in conscious and unconscious comparisons with the outgoing principal, Rubina Gainfort. Barrett’s teacher record states that she was appointed Temporary Assistant at Mac.Rob on 7 March 1955, which places her there while Rubina Gainfort served her last weeks as principal. What a contrast these two women must have made—Gainfort tall and slim, striking in her bearing, cultured in voice, conservative and reserved, yet quietly confident and self-assured, and Barrett, much more ‘healthy’ looking in body shape, colourful and modern in her well-cut square shouldered suits emblazoned with colourful brooches; feminine, confident and poised, and more socially candid perhaps. As one group of former students remarked imagining the two women together, the contrasts between them made an impact on many of the students, who felt that Miss Barrett ‘just wasn’t anything like Miss Gainfort’.

Another explanation for the hostility Barrett encountered can be traced to her arrival at Mac.Rob from the J.H. Boyd Domestic Arts College. According to Beatrice Faust, ‘There was a sense that Miss Barrett was an unworthy replacement for Miss Gainfort’. Other former students agree, suggesting that coming straight from a domestic arts school made

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148 Teacher record of Daphne Lillias Barrett.
149 Teacher record of Daphne Lillias Barrett.
150 Focus group, Camberwell, 17 August 2003.
151 Focus group, Camberwell.
152 Beatrice Faust (Fennessy), Letter to Pauline Parker, 25 November 2004, letter in author’s possession. Faust was one of the women who established the Women’s Electoral Lobby in the 1970s.
Barrett inferior in the minds of some of the older students.\textsuperscript{153} There was, then, an element of status anxiety and snobbery, mixed perhaps with strong feelings of loyalty to Rubina Gainfort—a sense of loss and a resistance to change can produce a hostile environment. Yet Gainfort too had been headmistress of a domestic arts school. The difference was that she came from the ‘Emily Mac’ to Mac.Rob as deputy principal, then stepped up into the principalship after it was advertised. In Barrett’s case, the lack of a transition period caused many to feel that an element of the school’s identity and continuity had somehow been forsaken. Former student Lilian Efron agrees, remembering that she felt a ‘complete sense of loss to have lost this wonderful headmistress’.\textsuperscript{154} Daphne Barrett was an unknown quantity, having no past connection with the school at all.

**Heading Mac.Rob**

*But it wouldn’t matter if Miss Barrett had been dying she would have been on stage on speech night making her speech. She was equally tough on herself as she was on the girls. I can see now that the girls would have been afraid of her because she was a stickler for convention. They couldn’t see the importance of wearing gloves, even in those days, unless it was cold.*

Kelsey Puckridge \textsuperscript{155}

There are many stories about Barrett that offer insights into her as a person and principal, and illustrate how she was experienced by her students. This first story, a powerful example of the principal’s confidence in a crisis, has become well entrenched within Mac.Rob mythology, although some details vary in the retelling. The story goes that during April 1955 an intruder found his way into a shed on the property abutting the school. Unable to get out, the man broke a window and was badly cut in the process. Once out of the shed he ran across the lawns, chasing girls who were eating their lunches nearby. Covered in blood he eventually found his way into the Mac.Rob building and into the principal’s office. According to Kelsey Puckridge, a teacher at the time, Barrett was unperturbed. She sat the man down and began to talk to him calmly, ‘like a sort of relative’. She asked him about himself and kept him talking. ‘She never batted an eyelid’, Kelsey divulges. ‘She never

\textsuperscript{153} Focus Group, MGHS, 26 November 2003. Also S. Sherson in an E-mail communication to Pauline Parker, 28 June 2005. Memories of Miss Daphne Barrett. Mary Hutton also came to Mac.Rob straight from a domestic arts school, although the circumstances of her appointment were different in 1934. The building of the new school at Albert Park and the problems with temporary headmistress, Sybil Llewelyn, may well have prevailed over potential analysis of Hutton’s previous appointment.

\textsuperscript{154} Interview with Lilian Efron, 11 September 2002.

\textsuperscript{155} Interview with Kelsey Puckridge, 12 March 2003. Girls, however, always stood when any teacher entered the room, as many readers will recall.
gave in. All she thought about was the safety of the girls’. Students’ experiences of Barrett are more complex than this glimpse into her headship. As Puckridge describes her former principal:

She was the old type headmistress, and she was a presence. You took note of Miss Barrett when she came into the room. The girls always stood up of course in those days when the headmistress came into the room. And that’s what Miss Barrett expected and demanded.

That said, while she is thought of with deep affection by many of her students, she is remembered more vicariously than any other principal. Often it came down to whether or not a girl was a compliant student and receptive to the conventions and the predominantly conservative social mores of the time.

Linda Edwards recalls two encounters she had with her former principal that made an impression on her as an independent, sometimes non-compliant, student. Linda, unlike most of her peers, was not brought up in a Christian environment. Nevertheless, all students were expected to attend weekly religious instruction in one of the faiths represented. According to Linda, Barrett was a vigorous Anglican who insisted that any girl not attending religious instruction should bring a note from a parent. This was standard practice for a school principal. After two years, however, Barrett suddenly changed the rules. To stem the tide of girls opting out of religious instruction she demanded both a letter from a parent and an interview with any girl who chose not to attend. This proved to be an effective deterrent for some girls and they returned to the lessons. Linda, however, fronted up for her interview. As Linda recalls, Barrett said to her, ‘You are a bit young to be set in your ways aren’t you? At your age you should be open to these things and go along to broaden your education’. Linda took this as a challenge and tried to negotiate with the principal, suggesting that she would indeed attend if she could alternate between different religions. Barrett rose to the challenge and inquired whether Linda had any relatives who were Jewish or Catholic. Linda did not. ‘Then you have to go to the other, the Protestant religious lesson’, the principal declared, according to Linda.

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156 Interview with Kelsey Puckridge, 12 March 2003.
157 Interview with Linda Edwards, 17 February 2005.
158 Interview with Linda Edwards, 17 February 2005.
Linda locked horns with her principal again, this time on the rule concerning acceptable hairstyles. As Linda remembers, girls were only allowed hairstyles that did not require pins. Linda’s hair was carefully coiffured—she found a way to get her hair just right without using any pins, thus observing the letter of the law. Barrett wanted to know how she had done it. ‘That’s all very clever’, she responded to Linda’s explanation, the former student recalls, ‘but I can’t let you do that as the other girls will copy you less successfully’. Whether or not Daphne Barrett was stretched by Linda’s self-confidence and creativity, there is perhaps a hint of admiration discernible in her response, even though she disallowed the hairstyle. On the other hand, perhaps the self-evident truth that lay at the heart of the rules Barrett set down—that rules were not for defying—was not obvious to nor acceptable for every student. Linda acknowledges honestly that she did not challenge Miss Barrett unless she thought she had a chance of winning, an attitude that might surprise other former students who would never have wanted to come up against her, or who never needed to.

Kelsey Puckridge, who taught art at Mac.Rob and has great respect and admiration for her principal, describes her as a great supporter of convention, an upholder of the standards of the day, particularly in relation to young women. Judging from women’s stories of their experiences of her, Daphne Barrett understood her position to be a role model for these things, developing and using a variety of stratagems to reinforce the feminine ideal. This was, perhaps, the burden of her office, her burden. The strategies she implemented were experienced quite differently among the students and staff, as has already been pointed out. For example, one former teacher recalls the experience of Barrett’s voice coming across the PA system: ‘Would the girl who travelled on the Glen Iris tram arriving at five to nine, who did not have her gloves on, please report to my office now’. Wendy Taylor (Brown), who started at Mac.Rob the same year as Daphne Barrett, remembers the same messages, and one former student recalls that, after one such call went out, a dozen girls turned up at the principal’s office. Members of the public, it seems, were happy to advise the school when a girl might be letting it down in public. It wasn’t just behaviour in public, however. Appearances were also an issue. Margaret Noble recorded in her diary in 1961 how a mother of a former student telephoned Miss Barrett complaining about a group of girls on a train with ‘grubby collars and untidy hairstyles’. Margaret could only comment that as a

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159 Interview with Linda Edwards, 17 February 2005.
160 Interview with Linda Edwards, 17 February 2005.
161 Interview with Kelsey Puckridge, 12 March 2003.
162 Interview with Judith Walsh, 25 July 2002.
163 Interview with Wendy Taylor (Brown), 18 September 2002.
schoolgirl she thought that such women should have better things to do than peer at girls’
collars on public transport.\textsuperscript{164}

Just as the girls of the Continuation School faced comparisons with their private school
counterparts, Mac.Rob girls were expected to meet exacting standards. The emphasis on
being a lady and keeping up appearances at all times was not well received nor easily
accepted by all students, however, and it dominates some memories of Daphne Barrett and
her headship. To some girls the rules about uniform and not talking to boys on trams and
trains were outdated and made no sense. Take, for example, the experience of Renata
Singer (Klein), who recalls that she felt oppressed the entire time she was at Mac.Rob. To
Renata, Daphne Barrett was an unintellectual figure who nevertheless wore her academic
gown while at school and presided over lengthy assemblies at which girls were instructed
on the right way to be good young ladies.\textsuperscript{165} Suzanne Russell (Wescott) could not recall
Barrett making an impact on her in an academic way either. According to Suzanne, ‘We all
thought Miss Barrett was a lady who was very refined, but we didn’t have anything to do
with her. Academically she was not very far-reaching and didn’t have a big impact’.\textsuperscript{166}
Implicated in these impressions is the fact that Daphne Barrett did not teach during her
headship and chose to have more contact with some students than she did with others. Her
predecessor, Rubina Gainfort, on the other hand, regularly took classes and combined
teaching and leadership.

Sue Sherson (Terry), a head prefect in the Barrett era, suggests a different point of view.
Sue recalls Barrett as a warm, welcoming principal with whom she developed a good
relationship—partly as a result of the regular meetings they had together. Sue never felt any
sense of fear in going to see the new head and, in her experience, Daphne Barrett was an
intelligent, sophisticated woman with a sense of humour and a great appreciation of the
arts.\textsuperscript{167} Bronwyn Hewitt saw Barrett in a similar light, and credits her with making a dream
of studying at the Conservatorium of Music at the University of Melbourne come true.
Bronwyn came to Mac.Rob from an impoverished family struggling to make ends meet
following the death of her father when she was in primary school. One day, according to
Bronwyn, Melbourne organist George Findlay, who composed Mac.Rob’s farewell song,

\begin{footnotes}
\item[164] Margaret L Noble, ‘Dear Diary: Or How We Were in 1961’, Personal diary, MGHS Archive, p. 58.
\item[165] Interview with Renata Singer (Klein), 27 August 2003. According to Judith Smart, Barrett used
to enter assemblies from side stage and wait until she could hear a pin she had brought with her
drop before she bid the girls good morning. J. Smart to P. Parker, 16 November 2006.
\item[166] Interview with Suzanne Russell (Wescott), 27 April 2004.
\item[167] Susan Sherson (Terry), E-mail narrative, 28 June 2005.
\end{footnotes}
Vale, heard Bronwyn playing at church and offered to teach her for nothing—so talented he thought her. Bronwyn’s mother, however, did not wish to accept what was, to her, charity and refused the offer. After being late for school one morning Bronwyn missed assembly and was ordered to the principal’s office. Bronwyn had not been in trouble before and being confronted by Daphne Barrett was too much for her; she broke down. According to Bronwyn, Barrett sensed that there was more at play than a girl being late for school, and she soon had the gist of Bronwyn’s situation—Bronwyn wanted desperately to study music at university, but had no teacher. ‘I don’t know what actually happened next’, Bronwyn explains, ‘as I was abruptly sent out of her office and told to dry my eyes. By the time I got home from school, I was going to be starting lessons with George Findlay’. 168

Rhonda White (Scott) had a similar personal encounter with Barrett, the memory of which, she divulges, has remained with her ever since. According to Rhonda, somebody stole her lesson notes just before examination time. She had no copies. Barrett did everything she could to trace the notes but was unsuccessful. In the meantime the students and staff were galvanised to produce new notes (handwritten) for Rhonda and, although feeling very emotional and traumatised after her experience, she sat each examination, inspired to do well for herself and those who had helped her. She not only passed three subjects and received first class honours in two further subjects; she was awarded a Commonwealth scholarship to university and a teaching bursary. Her victory was a shared one. On speech night, Miss Barrett came and sat down beside Rhonda. She told her that the person who had taken her notes had been identified but had destroyed the notes to protect herself.  She also told Rhonda how proud she was of her and the manner in which she had overcome such adversity (there were no photocopiers in 1965). Equally, the principal was impressed with the fact that the Mac.Rob community had rallied at such a pressure-filled time. ‘I felt very humbled by her admiration’, Rhonda confirmed forty years later.169

Robin Wren (Barker) does not have any happy memories of Daphne Barrett, however, nor of her two years (1955–56) as a student at Mac.Rob. Robin, whose mother was a former pupil (1930–32) who had enjoyed her time there, found Mac.Rob ‘emotionally cold and oppressive’. 170 Robin came from Mangarra Rd (Canterbury Girls’ School) because that school had only just introduced a limited fifth form, but coming in at this level made it hard for Robin to fit in. She had no friends in her class and faced a school culture that, she

168 Bronwyn Hewitt, E-mail narrative, 29 November 2004.
169 Rhonda White (Scott), E-mail narratives, 25 and 28 March 2005.
170 Interview with Robin Wren (Baker), February 2005.
recalls, was entirely different from what she had known: ‘We were given no orientation and expected to sink or swim’. To make matter worse, Robin’s mother became very ill and she had to take two weeks off school to keep house and look after her. When she returned to Mac.Rob, Robin had missed so much work she was unable to keep up. In early December 1956 she found employment with a patent attorney and left school two weeks early. Robin went to Barrett to receive her report book, but, according to her, the principal merely remarked that her maths was poor, ‘and that was that’. Robin felt hurt and disappointed at this peremptory dismissal, for she had been a high-achieving student at her former school. Ultimately, her experience at Mac.Rob was far less than she expected and Robin’s memories reflect this.

Libby Chanter (Oppy) also recalls Daphne Barrett as quite unapproachable, a woman ‘obsessed with decorum and the wearing of hats and gloves’. According to Libby, the principal stopped her in the corridor one morning as she headed towards the gym. Libby was dressed in her gym tunic but she did not have the mandatory white blouse underneath. Consequently, she found herself summoned to Miss Barrett’s office ‘for a please explain’. According to Libby, she explained that the blouse had become grubby from the previous day’s sport and that it had not dried after her mother had washed it. Libby came away from the office feeling that Barrett was too grudging in accepting her explanation. But, as former student Judith Cordingley argues, ‘Miss Barrett understood the need to present well and to guard one’s back’, and she tried to ‘educate her students accordingly’. Libby’s experience suggests that some girls might not have appreciated or understood Daphne Barrett’s rigid attitude towards appearances. Perhaps, too, some resisted her rigidity unable to make similar sense of it. From Libby’s point of view, Barrett was insensitive to her personal situation. She expected more empathy and felt harshly treated when she felt that she had tried to do her best. Clearly, values and expectations clashed. Things did not always make sense to every girl and memories are mediated and filtered accordingly.

In addition to the focus on being ladylike, Daphne Barrett had indisputably high academic expectations of her staff and students, although this was not apparent to every girl at the time. According to Judith Walsh, who later became a state high school principal herself,

171 Interview with Robin Wren (Baker), February 2005.
172 Interview with Robin Wren (Baker), February 2005.
173 E-mail narrative of Libby Chanter (Oppy), December 2004.
Barrett would not accept onto her staff any teacher who did not have a university degree.\textsuperscript{175} That said, she was obliged to retain those already employed there and not all were as well qualified as she desired. The 1960s saw the beginnings of mass secondary education and schools struggled to get enough qualified teachers to cope with increasing student numbers.\textsuperscript{176} When Barrett went to Mac.Rob in 1955, 66.6 per cent of Victorian secondary teachers had a university degree, but by the time she retired in 1965, that figure had fallen to 50.7 per cent.\textsuperscript{177} Robin Wren (Barker) recalls that there were unqualified temporary teachers at Mac.Rob in 1955 and 1956, as well as tertiary lecturers seconded to teach at Mac.Rob part-time, some of whom had degrees but no teacher training.\textsuperscript{178} Daphne Barrett may well have been trying to protect Mac.Rob’s academic and social standing, particularly in the face of competition from other schools as mass secondary education created more opportunities for girls to remain at high school beyond Intermediate level. East Camberwell Girls’ School (often referred to then as Mangarra, and now called Canterbury Girls’ Secondary College) had a sixth form added in 1958, and the private and denominational girls’ secondary schools were all engaged in building and curriculum expansion in one way or another. It is quite possible that Barrett decided to keep a subdued public profile for Mac.Rob during this period while working quietly to improve standards of teaching. This might, perhaps, explain in some way, her rigidity about behaviour and appearances. Sometimes, a ‘softly softly’ approach is strategic in allowing a school to consolidate and develop. Barrett’s approach was very much in line with society’s expectations of an academic girls’ state high school, the message being: you can be outstanding and successful, but you should do it as respectable, modest, intelligent young ladies. This was the double-edged sword for girls and women.

During the 1960s educational reform was under way, particularly in the field of science education.\textsuperscript{179} This may have given Barrett further reason to tread softly because a good proportion of her teachers had been at Mac.Rob for decades and needed training in new ideas and practices. With some girls demanding excellent teaching in order to qualify for

\textsuperscript{175} Interview with Judith Walsh, 25 July 2002. Barrett’s choice was understandable given the competition Mac.Rob faced as the number of Victorian state high schools increased. Excellent teachers were essential to produce excellent academic results and Mac.Rob’s reputation for academic excellence had to be prioritised.


\textsuperscript{178} Robin Wren (Barker), E-mail narrative, 24 November 2004.

Developing a qualified and proficient staff capable of meeting the demands of the university examinations presents its own particular challenges. As former students and staff have observed, nonetheless, Mac.Rob did have a head start with the generally high quality of its pupils. The point is that secondary education was undergoing transformation and Daphne Barrett had to juggle changing educational philosophy and curriculum with teachers who were often unqualified and unable to keep up with educational change.

Through all of this, Barrett took every opportunity open to her to prepare her students for life after school. She was familiar with the difficulties girls might face as they moved on into higher education and the work force, and she used the principal’s column in *Pallas* to share her views on issues important for young women at that time. Aware that her students would be making their own way in a rapidly changing world, she urged them to resist the idea that education was ultimately about becoming part of a huge production machine. She encouraged them to stand up against social pressures that require conformity (somewhat ironic perhaps) in thought, attitude and conduct, arguing that human values had to keep up with scientific development. She discussed regularly the purposes and value of education in a girl’s life. ‘Education’, she reminded them, ‘opens up the mind, and the heart’.

Recognising the increasing value of a good education, Barrett also highlighted Mac.Rob’s critical role in educating the state’s future teachers, and she encouraged her students to consider a career in teaching after being privileged with such an excellent education themselves. Such encouragement was clearly linked to citizenship, and teaching was represented as a noble profession for a girl to embrace. Daphne Barrett actually questioned girls on their career choices, according to Jennifer Pearson (Young). Jennifer recalls being summoned to the principal’s office at the end of 1960, along with several other girls, where Daphne Barrett asked them why they had not decided to become teachers. Jennifer explained that she had preferred to do nursing, but, she observes, it seemed odd to her that she had to explain herself at all at the time. Judith Smart also remembers being summoned to the principal’s office at the end of fourth form (Intermediate)——to explain her subject choices: she had not selected science or maths.

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180 Interview with Judith Walsh, 25 July 2002. See also Interview with Elizabeth Brown, 6 September 2004.
181 See *Pallas*, 1955–65. See also reports of the principal at annual speech nights, MGHS Archive.
182 *Pallas*, 1964.
183 Jennifer Pearson, (Young), E-mail narrative, 29 November 2002.
Judith was relieved that Daphne Barrett reluctantly accepted her explanation that she had no real aptitude for those subjects and preferred history, which she loved.\footnote{Judith Smart to Pauline Parker, September 2005.}

Barrett also tackled the contentious issue of student failure in first-year university courses with her students, and she related that failure to secondary school experiences. ‘Students who are too closely nurtured or too firmly directed in secondary school’, she argued, ‘often find in their new-found liberty that they have not developed the degree of self-discipline necessary for their successful application to studies’.\footnote{D. Barrett, \textit{Pallas} 1964.} She also warned the girls about the possible effects of choices they would make as young women, endeavouring to open their eyes to how society might work to constrain their personal ideals and desires. ‘Generally speaking’, she warned in 1965, her final year as principal, ‘only the misdeeds of youth reach the headlines’.\footnote{D. Barrett, \textit{Pallas} 1965.} It is perhaps reasonable to speculate at this point that Daphne Barrett’s personal beliefs concerning the role of women in society, and her educational philosophy in general, were influenced to some extent by her work with youth, in particular children classified as juvenile delinquents.\footnote{See O. S. Green and Clifford White, ‘A Complex of Organisations’, Book Nine, in L.J. Blake (ed), \textit{Vision and Realisation, Vol. 1}, Education Department of Victoria, Melbourne, p. 1159.} Seeing what could happen to girls and boys who did not have the privilege and security of a good family and a good education, she may well have pushed those who did have such advantages even harder than they might otherwise have expected.

On 11 June 1966 Daphne Barrett was made a Member of the British Empire (MBE) in recognition of her services to education, but former students appear to be largely unaware of her contributions to education beyond the school. Bronwyn Hewitt agrees, describing how she encountered Barrett in her first year of university at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music. Miss Barrett, it seems, turned up to assess Bronwyn for the continuation of her Commonwealth Department of Repatriation grant for fees and books: ‘Obviously Daphne Barrett played a much greater role in educational matters at a higher level than I would otherwise have known’.\footnote{Bronwyn Hewitt, E-mail narrative, 29 November 2004.}

Daphne Barrett served on many state and national committees, in fact. She was a member of the Victorian Universities and Schools Examination Board, the Council of Public Education and the influential Juvenile Delinquency Advisory Committee set up by Mr
Justice Barry in 1956 as part of a royal commission into juvenile delinquency. She was a member of the Education Committee of the Melbourne School of Nursing and a life member of the National Gallery Women’s Association. She was the representative of the Repatriation Department on the Soldiers’ Children’s Education Board and a founding member of the Australian College of Education, now known as the Australian College of Educators. Barrett was one of only 18 women out of 118 founder members who began the College at Geelong in May 1959. She was an active member of the Victorian Chapter of the College for at least 10 years, and for two of those she edited the Victorian Chapter newsletter. At four issues per year nationally, this was a heavy responsibility.

In May 1961, according to Margaret Noble’s diary from that year, Daphne Barrett suffered a stroke and was absent from school for two months.\footnote{Margaret L. Noble, ‘Dear Diary’, p. 39, MGHS Archive.} Judith Cordingley recalls that she also had to take sick leave in 1962 or 1963, to recover from shingles, ‘a disease in which stress is a major element’.\footnote{Judith Cordingley, Letter to P. Parker, 29 November 2004.} One can speculate that her heavy and diverse workload had an exponentially deleterious effect on her general health, but she does not appear to have modified her load to compensate. At school, nonetheless, she relied heavily on the expertise and energy of her deputy, Laura Trickett (another Continuation School student), one of many deputy principals who are, in retrospect, less visible achievers, to undertake the day-to-day running of the school.

In 1963, two years prior to her retirement, Daphne Barrett was made a Fellow of the ACE at the national conference in Perth. This was a significant public recognition of her contribution to education, as was her MBE. She continued to be active in the Victorian Chapter of the ACE in retirement, resigning in 1970 at the age of 69. Former students say that Daphne loved playing golf, something that was a surprise to many who made inquiries about her after reading an article in an issue of \textit{Vista}; her retirement, then, gave her the opportunity to enjoy her favourite sport at her own leisure. Daphne Barrett died on 3 March, 1981 at the age of 80.

Daphne Barrett’s successor faced a difficult time when she arrived at Mac.Rob, just as Barrett had ten years before when assuming the headship from Rubina Gainfort. Their difficult times, however, had few similarities, as the following story of Nina Carr’s headship suggests. Carr’s appointment coincided with a new phase in Australia’s political
and social culture, and the following chapter examines the principals who led Mac.Rob into an era marked by different challenges.
Chapter Six

Heading Mac.Rob 1966–2004

Nina Carr  1966–1971

Ours was a very liberated senior year with Nina Carr as principal. We had lunch-time rock concerts, including Daddy Cool, who were quite new at the time. We had an address from Don Chipp on the marijuana debate—very progressive, and we were also the year that radically changed the year book.

Suzanne Henden, 1968–71

She was a thinking person. She was not just a kind of prop who was up there and who had to play a certain role and was very two-dimensional.

Judith Buckrich

A wise, wry, and, in retrospect, a worldly woman, she instilled the importance of personal responsibility, treated us with respect and challenged our often very conservative views.

Justice Sally Brown (Hamilton)

When Nina said to jump, all you said was “how high”.

Suzanne Russell (Westcott)

By the time Nina Carr and her successor, Gwen Bowles, came along, the purposes of education were far more open to public debate and argument than previously. Now, the variety of ideas about pedagogy and the passion with which the ideas were proclaimed, along with the importance attached to teacher qualifications, encouraged the questioning of authority and the old certainties in education. Leadership was needed within the context of a variety of problems that had no clear solutions.

Nina Carr’s appointment as principal of Mac.Rob in 1966 signalled a change in approach from the traditional authoritarian one to a more democratic model of leadership. This was not necessarily welcomed by everyone within the Mac.Rob school community, particularly

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1 E-mail narrative of Suzanne Henden, 28 June 2005.
2 Interview with Judith Buckrich, 12 October 2003.
4 Interview with Suzanne Russell (Westcott), 20 April 2004.
members of staff who felt threatened by change. Carr’s headship was essentially change based, whereas previous heads had promoted traditional values to set the tone and discipline of the school. At the same time, Nina Carr sought to protect and preserve those values and traditions that were important to the school’s identity.

Nina Livingstone Carr, born in Geelong in 1907, did not initially intend to become a teacher; rather, she joined the teaching profession on the advice of her older sister. Carr did not move into secondary teaching until 1930, after spending some years teaching in country elementary schools. Secondary teaching had more to offer by way of interest and promotion, and Nina Carr wanted more than what she found as a primary school teacher. Her early teacher inspection reports between 1930 and 1934 describe her as earnest and hard working. But they also reveal that she needed to improve her teaching technique to be more ‘stimulating and forceful’ and to strive harder to gain the ‘interest and attention of every student’. By 1935, her reports were far more positive, recognising her earnest interest in the welfare of her students and their activities, particularly sport. After deciding to move into secondary teaching, she enrolled at Melbourne University and graduated Bachelor of Arts in 1937, all the while continuing to teach full-time. Seven years later, she was awarded a Diploma of Education to complete her formal qualifications. For teachers in rural schools, the tradition of staying in ‘third-rate pubs’ continued to flourish throughout the 1930s, and Nina Carr followed the path of her predecessors when she could not find suitable accommodation during her teaching stints in the country. She taught at Bairnsdale, Warrnambool, Echuca, Colac and Mentone, and her annual inspection reports paint a picture of a stimulating, enthusiastic, experienced and highly competent teacher. Carr excelled, however, as the principal who established Mentone Girls’ Secondary School in 1955, and she found her special niche as a pioneer in girls’ secondary education.

Nina Carr was no newcomer to Mac.Rob when she succeeded Daphne Barrett as principal in 1966, for she had spent time there as a ‘lowly class V teacher’ between 1937 and 1939 when Mary Hutton was headmistress. She summed up those three years, in a 1982 interview, as ‘an opportunity to learn something about the traditions of the school and the standards it set for its students’. The smallest class she taught at Mac.Rob was a French

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5 Teacher record of Nina Livingstone Carr, VPRS 13718.
6 Teacher record of Nina Livingstone Carr, VPRS 13718.
7 Teacher record of Nina Livingstone Carr, VPRS 13718.
8 See interviews with Lesley Boston and Suzanne Russell (Westcott) for information on Carr at Mentone.
9 Recollections of Nina Carr, MGHS Archive.
class of 48 girls and she spent every night at home correcting students’ work. In the late 1930s there was a significant change in the ethnic composition of the school as Australia experienced an influx of migrants fleeing from the Nazi regime in Germany and Eastern Europe. ‘The school’, Carr explained, ‘accommodated a good many girls from migrant families’, and in addition to large classes, teaching was made more difficult by a lack of specialist teachers. As a consequence, most members of staff had no choice but to teach subjects for which they had no training and little knowledge. Nina Carr found herself teaching intermediate science for which her only preparation was a unit of botany studied at university.

In addition to classroom duties, each teacher was also responsible for other aspects of school life, an opportunity actively sought out by Christina Montgomery when she taught at the Continuation School, but often regarded as an extra burden by teachers three decades later. Nina Carr’s extra responsibilities included being house mistress of Dryads, teacher-in-charge of pound (lost property and items taken from girls for disciplinary reasons) and teacher-in-charge of hockey. ‘You couldn’t and didn’t refuse to teach what was allotted to you’, she recalled. ‘Somehow one accepted the decisions of the principal and her deputy.’

Like others among her predecessors, Carr travelled to England in the early 1950s. She spent a year teaching at an English grammar school under the teacher exchange program—a popular opportunity with women teachers in an era when travel, with its potential to broaden the mind and a woman’s life experience, was viewed as an educational asset.

If Daphne Barrett had a tough time coming in on the heels of Rubina Gainfort, Nina Carr had an equally tough struggle following Barrett, though for different reasons. Some teachers did not respond well to the inevitable change Carr’s arrival foreshadowed, for she represented a departure from the traditionally strict and moralistic culture that had begun with Joseph Hocking and Margery Robertson in 1905. Her appointment marked a break with the past, and even though, to those women who shared their memories and perspectives for this history, Nina Carr was very sensitive to the feelings and needs of her staff, there were some who actively resisted her efforts to introduce change throughout the school. A comparative newcomer to the teaching staff at the time, Judith Walsh claims that Carr was much less inclined to dispense graces from her office and much more concerned

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10 Recollections of Nina Carr, MGHS Archive.
11 Recollections of Nina Carr, MGHS Archive.
to know what was going on in the school,\textsuperscript{12} something the principal noted of herself in 1982. ‘Once you enter the principal class’, she insisted, ‘there is no need to disassociate yourself from the general workings of the school and become a recluse in an office’.\textsuperscript{13} It is Walsh’s considered opinion that Nina Carr was treading very, very carefully at the time because, she reflects, ‘It was possible to offend members of staff just doing what she was’. Inevitably, the legacy of her predecessor included bonds and loyalties Daphne Barrett had forged with the teaching staff over ten years spent together, and, Judith Walsh concludes, ‘They had lost a bit of power because the power relationship with the previous principal had been quite strong, and then in came this person who didn’t have that relationship with them’.\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{Heading Mac.Rob in the 1960s}

The 1950s were a time of quiescence and smugness whereas the 1960s were a time of confusion, a confused momentum of spiritualism, intellectualism, violence, questioning, challenging over an existent conservatism that underpinned everything. Then the 1960s came along and there is a general disruption with a rise in casual sex, sexual experimentation, sexual revolution, and this was beamed into people’s homes via the television. The wreckage of the 1960s was extensive, ragged, brutal, gentle, disruption.

Brian Matthews at ‘Go! Melbourne in the 1960s’ conference 2002 \textsuperscript{15}

Nina Carr’s appointment as principal during a period of rapid social change came with a mandate to lead the school into a new era. Her headship, in terms of educational approach and objectives, took place during some of the most radical and profound social upheaval and transformation Australia, indeed the western world, had witnessed to that time. These changes included increasing protests against the Vietnam War, further waves of immigration that added other groups to the Jewish presence at Mac.Rob, the arrival of the teenager as a social identity, student revolt, sexual revolt and the contraceptive pill. Two men walked on the moon while the Cold War’s evocation of the ‘red menace’ saw Victorian secondary school teachers’ political persuasions under intense scrutiny. In the 1960s psychedelic ‘age of Aquarius’, the Mac.Rob girl at the age of 18, whilst nominally still a school girl, was also legally an adult who might, if her parents could

\textsuperscript{12} Interview with Judith Walsh, 25 July 2002. See also: Interview with Kelsey Puckridge, 12 March 2003.

\textsuperscript{13} Recollections of Nina Carr, MGHS Archive.

\textsuperscript{14} Interview with Judith Walsh, 25 July 2002

\textsuperscript{15} Brian Matthews speaking at ‘Go! Melbourne in the 1960s’, La Trobe and Monash Universities combined conference, 4–5 October 2002.
afford it, have her own car and drive herself to school, and she was legally able to marry. Within this context, education was caught up in the momentum of reform as mass schooling expanded at an unprecedented rate.

From just under 25,000 students enrolled in state secondary schools in 1930, the number had risen to just over 131,000 when Nina Carr took on the principalship of Mac.Rob in 1966.\(^\text{16}\) State secondary schools, however, were well below the private and independent schools in the number of students staying on to complete the final year. With the school leaving age increased to 15 years in 1966, more children remained at school, and, inevitably, there were teacher shortages along with the continuing problem of unqualified and untrained teachers being employed in state secondary schools. There was also an ongoing shortage of classrooms that led to increased class sizes. Former students and teachers from the 1960s and 1970s remember well classes held in corridors and storerooms when student numbers at Mac.Rob exceeded the available teaching space.

For Nina Carr, managing the spirit of rebellion that surfaced at Mac.Rob was not easy, although she understood its genesis. ‘With the Vietnam War’, she explained, ‘and so many young men involved in National Service, so many raising objections to the ballot system, so many people in the community taking an anti-Vietnam stand, it’s not surprising that the spirit of revolt was noticed in the school’.\(^\text{17}\) Perhaps Carr’s own testimony (given in an interview some years after her retirement) in the following paragraphs offers the clearest insight into what was happening at the time, as well as how she understood it and responded as head.

According to Nina Carr, a number of girls began to believe that some of the conventions to which they had adhered over the years were no longer necessary.

They could make their own choice; the phrase “doing one’s own thing” was born. They were unable to see that in the final count, “doing one’s own thing” could be synonymous with selfishness, that they could destroy the bases of society, not just the trappings of society. I could understand their impatience in this regard. They couldn’t see that they could not destroy the

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\(^{17}\) Recollections of Nina Carr, MGHS Archive.
bases on which the school was built unless they had worthwhile bases with which to replace those that had been destroyed.\textsuperscript{18}

**Tradition**

Certainly it was a traditional school, which is why so many parents wished to send their girls there. Certainly the traditions didn’t mean a great deal to a number of the girls. They began to question the value of a number of traditions: “Why do we have to wear uniforms? I’m the same girl whether or not I’m in or out of uniform. We don’t have to attend classes if we don’t want to. Why do we have to go to sport or participate in physical education (PE)? Why can’t we march in a demonstration?”\textsuperscript{19}

**Independence and idealism**

Actually, they had permission to march in an anti-Vietnam demonstration on the condition that they didn’t wear school uniform. The anti-Vietnam feeling was a commonly held community attitude and I felt that if they were sincere in their beliefs it was not for me to question them. They were not representing the school in this matter, consequently, no uniform. I had this out with them previously when several girls demonstrated in the City Square about an incident at Melbourne High School. When they were questioned at assembly the next day about the incident, all of them owned up to their participation in the demonstration and were able to put their viewpoints to the rest of the school. I gave them one or two facts, which they weren’t aware of, and the whole matter was sorted out. One had to try to understand what they, as idealists, were trying to do and there wasn’t a great deal of antagonism directed against me personally. We could generally work together quietly and amicably.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{18} Recollections of Nina Carr, MGHS Archive.
\textsuperscript{19} Recollections of Nina Carr, MGHS Archive.
\textsuperscript{20} Recollections of Nina Carr, MGHS Archive.
Breaking away from ‘the establishment’

Students also wanted to change the school magazine, *Pallas*, and Nina Carr prudently put aside her personal preference in a spirit of collaborative decision-making—of give and take. As she acknowledged herself, ‘Some rebellions were not worth the potential bitterness that could ensue if they were brutally quashed’.21 Once again, she reveals her thoughts about her headship in her own words:

Although I much preferred the old traditional form of the magazine, the girls producing the magazine and the staff member in charge all wanted something different. It was a time of breaking away from the establishment, as I have explained. I felt it wasn’t worthwhile having antagonism over the magazine. The magazine was being produced, the enthusiasm was there and the format, although I didn’t care for it, wasn’t vitally important. It was the time of the underground newspapers, which were coming into the school from outside sources. These encouraged students to cast off the shackles of authoritarianism. I considered it important to establish and maintain contact with the girls, which is why I thought assemblies were so important. The girls often invited people from outside the school to address them and the girls themselves were given the opportunity to speak to the assembly.22

Because she believed communication was an important aspect of effective leadership, Carr elected to have an open-door policy and, to ensure that this was possible, she tried to leave the school only when necessary.23 She wanted her students to know that she was accessible and she concentrated on building up an environment of trust and openness in communication. The girls, however, were not quite finished with challenging the relevance of traditions and symbols of authority at Mac.Rob as Nina Carr explained:

The prefect system

In the first year of my term as principal the girls were beginning to decide that they didn’t need prefects. They would be better off without them. They were less willing to become prefects. The office was no longer seen to be one

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21 Recollections of Nina Carr, MGHS Archive.
22 Recollections of Nina Carr, MGHS Archive.
23 Recollections of Nina Carr, MGHS Archive.
to be proud of, but symbolised authority. I didn’t relinquish the system despite this attitude and, of course, there were still girls who felt honoured to be elected prefects. At the same time, SRC (Student Representative Council) representatives were elected from each form and these “reps” [representatives] and the prefects could hold meetings and discussion and bring their decisions and suggestions to me.24

**Threats to school discipline**

The girls, according to Carr, were also encouraged to resist authority by the numerous teachers’ strikes in the 1970s,25 and there are former students who confirm that they decided to wag school because they were sick of interruptions to routine, and because it was a daring thing to do. The strikes provided models for resistance, but their frequency eventually created a real threat to overall discipline and the school’s reputation. According to Nina Carr:

In the last few years [of my term] the Victorian Secondary Teachers’ Association (VSTA) was very active and there were frequent strikes. At least they seemed frequent. While I was in sympathy with what they were striking for at the time [that only qualified teachers be appointed to a school] I could not align myself with one side or another. I did not put anything in the way of those going on strike, nor did I discuss the position with the girls except at the time of the first strike. Then, at an assembly, I said that some members of the staff would be absent but that classes were to continue work in their normal classrooms just as if the teachers were there. That worked particularly well until the strikes were more frequent and some of the girls decided that it wasn’t worthwhile coming to school when their teachers were absent. This led to absenteeism and a breakdown of discipline, which was hard to deal with.26

Nina Carr’s own recollections provide a vivid picture of how she ran the school on a day-to-day basis, of what mattered to her as an educator and leader, and how she went about

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24 Recollections of Nina Carr, MGHS Archive.
26 Recollections of Nina Carr, MGHS Archive. See also Cheryl Griffin, ‘A Biography of Doris McRae’, for an account of the experience of being a secondary teacher in the state system during Carr’s term at Mac.Rob.
democratising her headship. In fact, the term ‘headship’ is a less accurate description of her period at Mac.Rob than it was for her predecessors, for, by all accounts, she empowered her students and staff while discontinuing traditional authoritarian patterns of leadership. This was part of the problem she faced with those members of staff who were more comfortable with the power bases they had built up over time under Daphne Barrett. Carr’s word could still be final when she judged it appropriate, but she preferred to hand over to the teachers and students responsibility for managing themselves rather than being managed. The reflections of a focus group of former students on Nina Carr’s principalship confirm this. According to these women, Daphne Barrett and teachers who had been at Mac.Rob for a long time called on the school motto, potens sui, regularly, as if a mantra, to remind girls to behave themselves. Nina Carr, however, did not use the motto as a disciplinary aid, although, former students acknowledge, it fitted in neatly with her encouragement of the girls to be responsible for their own decisions and actions.²⁷

Nina Carr also took seriously the complaints of students about poor teaching, an issue that arises constantly in women’s memories of their schooling at Mac.Rob—more so than stories of outstanding, inspiring teachers. In 1967, Carr acknowledged the difficulties the Matriculation literature class was having with its third teacher for the year and, instead of reprimanding those who stopped attending, visited the class for herself then saw to it that extra lessons were provided to assist the girls, but on condition that they returned to their regular classes. Nina Carr took one of the additional classes herself—an inspirational discussion of H. G. Wells’ *The History of Mr Polly.*²⁸

Nina Carr was revered and loved by her students, regardless of their many disagreements. Former student Judith Buckrich remembers one clash that provoked a good deal of anger from some students. According to Judith, the principal warned these girls that they were not up to the expected academic standard and thus should not move up to the next year level—they were just not ready.²⁹ This incurred the students’ wrath, according to Judith, but she understood down the track Carr’s point that academic standards at Mac.Rob needed improvement. Ultimately, according to Buckrich, Carr’s threat to make girls repeat a year caused some of them to examine their attitudes and work ethic, and their standards

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²⁷ Focus Group, Balwyn, 18 July 2004.
²⁸ Recollections of Nina Carr, MGHS Archive. *The History of Mr Polly* would have been an apt text for study because of its underlying highly moral message that one should never give up and that one should embrace and follow one’s intuitive self in the pursuit of a happy, fulfilling life.
²⁹ Such students had the potential to diminish the school’s excellent academic reputation and examination success.
improved. Despite such clashes there was much about Carr to appreciate, former students’ stories reveal. Suzanne Russell (Westcott) recounted one story in particular that revealed Nina Carr’s wry sense of humour, a characteristic many would have appreciated. It also suggests that she could be pragmatic as the occasion demanded, that she was no prude, and that she could rise to just about any occasion, particularly the unexpected.

The story goes that Nina Carr once travelled to China with a group of students and teachers in the late 1960s, when the idea of establishing sister schools and sister cities was just gaining popularity. In one of the towns they visited, they discovered that they had to use a communal toilet. This toilet was made up of a long plank with holes in it, and as many people as there were holes could sit along the plank to relieve themselves. According to Suzanne, a teacher found herself seated on the plank next to Nina: ‘There was Nina’, she said, ‘very small but very imperious’. And Carr remarked to her travelling companion, ‘Well I never thought that I’d be sitting here, Margery [Ovenden], beside you and asking you to pass me the toilet paper’.

In Daphne Barrett’s time some students were critical of the guest speakers who came in to speak to the girls at weekly assemblies. They especially found the ‘old girls’ who addressed them boring and uninspiring. Nina Carr continued the tradition of the guest speaker, but with a marked difference. She tried to make these experiences more immediately relevant to the girls’ interests. She thus included speakers from a variety of walks of life, successful and ground-breaking women with diverse and interesting experiences to share. One guest speaker was Myra Roper, who had travelled to China and was a key figure in the Australia–China Friendship Association. As the girls were studying China in history and geography classes, ‘they were interested and soon engrossed’. Judith Buckrich recalls that assembly and the value of assemblies generally as forums for idea sharing:

She [Myra Roper] was a very famous woman and she spoke so glowingly of the communist government in China. I was just amazed by it all. That’s when I twigged to it that Nina Carr was very open to any woman who had been successful—no matter what they were or who they were or what they’d done. It was terrific. Every Monday or every second Monday we’d have a

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30 Interview with Judith Buckrich, 12 October 2003.
31 Interview with Suzanne Russell (Westcott), 20 April 2004.
32 For information on Myra Roper see Julia Ryder, 1994, 'The "Fellow-Travellers": Myra Roper and Australian perceptions of China, 1958–72', BA. Hons thesis, La Trobe University, Melbourne.
woman up there who had made a great success of her life. I mean, we were fifth and sixth year students and we thought that we could do that. I think Miss Carr was really brave. It was a school for ladies when Nina came in. That was really such an important part of it; Nina Carr just went no. The most important thing was that we make girls to come out of here who are going to be successful and have interesting lives.\textsuperscript{33}

It is compelling in hindsight to contemplate Nina Carr’s decision to invite Myra Roper to speak to the students at a time when state secondary school teachers were under scrutiny for fear that they preach communism to their students. Roper, a prolific author on Communist China, and Head of University College at the University of Melbourne 1947–60, lectured widely during 1966 and her unique experiences at that time would have provided the girls of Mac.Rob with a different perspective from that of the media at the time of the Cold War and its accompanying voracious witch hunts for ‘reds’ in the public sphere.

\textbf{Taking Mac.Rob into a new world}

According to Inspector of Secondary Schools T. J. Ford in 1983, Nina Carr ‘knew that times were changing and set about building the notion that Mac.Robertson must re-make its reputation in the new society or see its decline’.\textsuperscript{34} As we have seen, Carr faced resentment among some of the staff when she came to Mac.Rob from Mentone Girls Secondary School, a lesser school in their eyes. Suzanne Russell (Westcott) reflected further on this, adding, ‘You could imagine Nina telling the staff at Mac.Rob what was going to be done, whereas the staff would have said we’re the experts. Why are you interfering in our area?’\textsuperscript{35}

There were many things that Nina Carr was not able to accomplish during her tenure, and she expressed her regret at leaving her successor, Gwen Bowles, with the task of seeing a substantial capital works program through to completion. Carr did, however, oversee the planting of the rose garden in the school courtyard and the completion of the Barrett-Carr library, a vital resource at the time in improving academic standards. Nina Carr retired in 1971, after a relatively short period as principal at Mac.Rob, but she remained active in her retirement. She was elected President of Convocation and served on the Committee of Convocation at the University of Melbourne between January and May 1986. She was also

\textsuperscript{33} Interview with Judith Buckrich, 12 October 2003.
\textsuperscript{34} T.J. Ford. ‘Written recollection of Nina Carr’, 13 October 1983. MGHS Archive, Unit 23.
\textsuperscript{35} Interview with Suzanne Russell (Westcott), 27 April 2004.
a driving force for many years behind the Association of Civil Widows Bursary Scheme. She continued her association with Mac.Rob by returning to attend assemblies and speech nights—itself an on-going tradition among Mac.Rob heads. She also supported her successors, Gwen Bowles, and, later, Gabrielle Blood, giving them the benefit of her experience and wisdom as an educator and educational leader. Gabrielle Blood acknowledges Nina Carr’s influence, describing her as a woman of humour and warm compassion. ‘Nina Carr’, she observes, ‘was a woman of great energy and drive, but one who always made considered judgements’.36

Nina Carr died on 24 April 1992. Her legacy to Mac.Rob and to youth in general is perhaps encapsulated in something she wrote for her students at Mentone in 1964, reprinted after her death by Gabrielle Blood in Pallas:

Happiness, laughter, courage, friendship, love,
are all as old-fashioned as the earth.
Whatever else we cast out
in our eagerness to embrace what is modern,
let us preserve these.

Gwen Bowles
1972–1984

Some historian, one day, may find it interesting to investigate whether the State Education Departments of Australia obtained disproportionate leadership and service from people born in rural towns.

T. J. Ford, Pallas 1984 37

It's always difficult at Mac.Rob I think for the first year that you get there because... people are...looking for change but they don't really like it because they feel insecure.

Gwen Bowles, 2003 38

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36 Interview with Gabrielle Blood, 4 September 2003.
37 T.J. (Jack) Ford, Pallas, 1984. Ford was Director of Secondary Education (and Chief Inspector) in Victoria until the position was abolished in 1983.
38 Interview with Gwen Bowles, 26 September 2003.
My first appointment after graduating was Bendigo. I decided that I’d like to go home for a bit. The hard part was that people thought you were going to pick up where you had left off before, and I wasn’t the same person.

Gwen Bowles, 2003

In some ways we are still a traditional school and we take pride that academic excellence is one of our aims. However, this doesn’t mean that we ignore changes…I hope that we can make students aware of what is happening in the world today, so that they can make a very real contribution to the community by becoming its leaders.

Gwen Bowles, *Pallas* 1973

Commonwealth grants seem to have passed us by.

Gwen Bowles, *Pallas* 1974

Gweneth Mabel Bowles succeeded Nina Carr as Mac.Rob’s principal in 1972. The length of her tenure, fifteen years, is second only to that of Mary Hutton, a notable and perhaps surprising accomplishment as her story suggests. Like her predecessor, Gwen Bowles was a country girl. Born in Bendigo in 1925 she was the youngest of three children. She began her secondary schooling at Bendigo Girls Secondary School but transferred to Bendigo High School on a scholarship three years later. Too young to enrol at Melbourne Teachers’ College when she matriculated, she became a student teacher at Footscray’s Hyde Street State School, where she remained for two years. ‘There was not a blade of grass there anywhere’, she recalled in her interview for this history. During that time she also endured a short stint at a one-roomed school at Drouin West, an experience that made her determined ‘never to become a primary teacher’. As a student teacher she received excellent reports from the inspectors, who regularly noted her outstanding musical talent. Her musical ability must have been valued during those years for there were no specialist teachers, and her willingness to play and teach music would have added depth to the school curriculum.

Gwen Bowles’ memory of life as a student teacher is worth a brief glance as it sheds light on the difficulties faced by women in further education and the demands placed upon a

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39 Interview with Gwen Bowles, 26 September 2003.
42 Interview with Gwen Bowles, 19 September 2003.
43 Interview with Gwen Bowles, 19 September 2003.
young woman beginning a teaching career in the 1940s. Whilst studying at the teachers’
college Bowles lived in a hostel in Drummond Street, Carlton. There were six girls to a
room and little privacy. She studied teaching and music theory while completing
Matriculation subjects to qualify for the Bachelor of Music course at the Conservatorium of
Music. Her days began at seven in the morning and study often continued until after ten at
night.44 Her progress reports praise her contributions to the musical life of the hostel and
the teachers’ college and her outstanding academic progress.45 It was work and study for six
days a week and, Bowles reflects, ‘I had to watch my time carefully because I couldn’t
afford to waste it’. The budding young teacher and her fellow students were permitted to go
out one night a week, but they were never allowed to bring men into their rooms. Any
instance of inappropriate behaviour meant expulsion from the hostel and, most likely, from
teaching.46

Gwen Bowles’ first school was Bendigo High School, where she remained for over a
decade. A newly graduated female teacher, she ‘paid her dues’ within the culture of the
education system. As one of only five women on a staff of forty men, she remembers doing
more yard duty than did her male counterparts and she often found herself in charge of two
hundred students for an afternoon’s sport. Her solution was intuitively pragmatic: she just
placed competent students in charge of the various games and then moved around to
monitor them.47 She did, of course, receive less pay than her male counterparts who were
not taking sport.

Bowles’ musical proficiency was quickly recognised, and she trained a range of choirs and
madrigal groups, mostly during lunch times and after school. When she eventually advised
her principal that she just could not do it all, he in turn wondered what he would do with the
students, explains Bowles. It wasn’t just about keeping students busy, she recalls, because
the principal specifically commented on the positive effect of the music program on the
school’s tone. According to Bowles, the principal felt that music gave the school new life,
and students and staff subsequently confirmed this by raising money to purchase musical

44 Cheryl Griffin depicts the daily schedule of the student teacher as gruelling in her compelling
biography of Doris McRae. See Griffin, ‘Biography of Doris McRae’, chapters one and two.
McRae was a MCS pupil in 1908. She became a teacher, joined the communist party, was vice-
president of the VTU and eventually resigned from the Education Department following complaints
that her politics were interfering in her work as an educationist.
45 Teacher record of Gwen Bowles, VPRS 13718.
46 Interview with Gwen Bowles, 19 September 2003.
instruments. These examples illustrate the kind of experience Gwen Bowles had as a state high school teacher across a decade, experiences that she is certain influenced her personal and professional development. Her organisational and leadership skills, flexibility and resilience were honed, over and over, often in subtle and informal ways, as a consequence of the duties and responsibilities allocated to her as she climbed the promotional ladder. In 1959 Bowles travelled by sea to England as an exchange teacher at the Liverpool Girls College and, as she recalled in one interview, a life-long passion for travel began. Indeed, in *Pallas* 1976, she wrote about her extensive travels during her long service leave that year. In that article she shared the things that were important to her as she moved from country to country. She related what she had learned about people, cultures, social problems and education across three continents and more than a dozen countries. It would not be farfetched to speculate that her article stimulated a desire to travel in some of her readers, while broadening the awareness of other students about places beyond Australian (even Victorian) shores.

**Mac.Rob in context in the 1970s**

When Gwen Bowles took up the principalship at Mac.Rob in 1972, Victorian schools were still adjusting to immense social upheaval. Vietnam War protests escalated in the 1970s. There were widespread strikes throughout the Victorian workforce, particularly in the service industries of public transport and power; many former students shared stories about the difficulties of getting to and from school when sudden transport strikes were called. There was further expansion of state secondary schooling with new high schools being built, and suddenly university education was free (1 January 1974) after the election of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) to federal government in December 1972. The Labor government ended the traditional imperial honours list and established diplomatic relations with China. It recalled the last Australian troops remaining in Vietnam and released all National Service Act offenders from prison. In 1972 the Labor government placed a ban on all things French in anticipation of France’s decision to test nuclear weapons in the South Pacific. The environment and Aboriginal land rights became central political issues, and Elizabeth Reid was appointed advisor on women’s affairs to the federal government, the first such position in the world. McDonald’s hamburgers reached Australia, and the Rolling Stones and the Kirov Ballet toured in 1973. The following year, the national anthem, ‘God save the Queen’, was replaced by ‘Advance Australia Fair’. Television was broadcast in

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48 Interview with Gwen Bowles, 19 September 2003.
colour in 1975 and, for the first time, male names were given to hurricanes. Then, on 22 November 1975, the governor General, John Kerr, dismissed the second Whitlam government and John Malcolm Fraser became the Prime Minister of Australia. These are highly eclectic and broad brushstrokes of what was happening at various levels of life in Australia, but they serve to illustrate the complexity and rapidity of change.

In the 1970s, education continued to be transformed with the publication of the pivotal Karmel Report (1973), which came out of the Australian Schools Commission set up in 1972 to recommend a program of expenditure on education for the Commonwealth Government. In an effort to improve equality of educational opportunity there was an expansion of colleges of advanced education and a massive increase in Commonwealth funding ($700 million) for state and private schools, as well as the establishment of new universities in the second half of the 1970s. At Mac.Rob this wider social and educational transformation had its effects, as the Director of Secondary Education until 1984, T. J. Ford, noted in the 1984 edition of *Pallas*:

In that period, every fundamental about the school [Mac.Rob] has come under some kind of challenge. The school has had to experience the pressures of the public becoming disenchanted with the school, with academic traditions and with conservative curriculum. Teachers, once expected to express loyalty individually in traditional ways, became more self-assertive and collectively militant. Pupils, conditioned by a life that was secure and relatively affluent became harder to motivate and, later, in the face of significantly changed prospects for the future, became anxious and a little despairing. During the same time, local populations fell and Mac.Robertson girls became subject to questions about elitist intakes and special privileges.

**Resistance**

According to Gwen Bowles, her first year at Mac.Rob was ‘sheer hell’, but, as she recalls pragmatically and sympathetically, ‘It was hell for everyone in education at the time. There was turmoil everywhere with education. You felt you didn’t know anything about

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education anymore’.

In the midst of this, she recalls, she was confronted with active resistance from her students when a group of fifty young radicals went on strike over the issue of compulsory school uniform. They argued, according to the former principal, that Mac.Rob’s uniform policy represented a threat to their individuality and autonomy, and they refused to wear their school uniforms for some weeks. As if taking a leaf out of Nina Carr’s leadership book, Gwen Bowles decided to modify the uniform requirements, giving final year students a choice in the colour of their school jumpers, and year 12 students were also allowed to wear ‘civvies’ after Easter in their final year.

Resistance, according to former students, took different forms. A girl could run instead of walk, speak loudly instead of softly, drop papers, bang a locker door, pretend that she could not hear a teacher, speak when she should not, ‘lose’ part of her uniform or pretend to be ill. These examples illustrate the more subtle means by which a girl might exert her own version of power when she did not like the messages she was being given by teachers as they implemented rules and enforced strict codes of behaviour. But the overt resistance experienced by Gwen Bowles was a more collective act where girls banded together to protest and drew on the group’s strength for confidence and direction.

Curriculum innovation and staffing

*Schools are deeply rooted at the core of the emerging knowledge society.*  
*They have always been one of society’s primary users of current knowledge.*  
*They are the creators of the new knowledge embedded in the learning of their students. Schooling is the engine of the future knowledge society.*

Resistance from within the student body was accompanied by struggles within the teaching staff, as pedagogical change created unease and threatened the secure niches some teachers had created for themselves over the years. Many teachers experienced severe anxiety as ongoing curriculum change created frustration and pressure. Where a number of teachers were fearful of change itself, others were critical of what change meant. It not inconceivable that some teachers may have been influenced by the radical ideas of Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich, two different but highly influential thinkers on education during the

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51 Interview with Gwen Bowles, 19 September 2003.  
52 Interview with Gwen Bowles, 19 September 2003.  
53 Record of discussions with former students in P. Parker’s journal.  
1960s and 1970s. Some teachers, according to Bowles, thought that ‘innovative’ subjects such as general studies and social studies were poor substitutes for the excellent history and geography courses they had taught for decades, and indeed there was a trend in the 1970s for girls to choose more ‘lightweight’ subjects instead of the sciences and traditionally strong humanities (such as history and languages). Feminist education historian Jill Blackmore has studied this trend towards hierarchies of school knowledge and its implications for women and girls, and her conclusions illustrate a dilemma for a school like Mac.Rob in the 1970s. As Blackmore points out, in the 1970s girls were staying on at school longer then previously (and longer than boys), and the new courses of study being offered by the universities meant that schools had to offer the appropriate subjects to prepare students for these courses. This created pressure on Mac.Rob as it worked to lift the level of the academic success of its students to compete with the success rate of girls in private and corporate schools.

These schools continued to dominate university entrance, particularly in the sciences. The problem was, as stories of former students suggest, parents saw Mac.Rob as a ticket to better employment prospects for their daughters, not just as a ticket to university. According to Blackmore, employment prospects for girls and women in the 1970s were changing; for example, the development of the word processor caused the clerical labour market to weaken. Girls stayed longer at school, and Mac.Rob, with its excellent reputation as an educator of girls, faced competing expectations from students and their families and an education system undergoing radical change—in particular, curriculum innovation and the growing power of the competitive academic curriculum over the vocational curriculum.

56 This was a national phenomenon within secondary schools—an issue related to girls’ educational outcomes, and at Mac.Rob it was a concern because of the school’s desire to build a strong academic reputation. See K. C. McKinnon, 1975, Girls, School and Society: Report by a Study Group to the Schools Commission, Schools Commission, Canberra.
57 Jill Blackmore, 1992, Making Educational History: A Feminist Perspective, Deakin University Press, Geelong, pp. 70 and 86. See also Chapter 8, ‘Selective Schooling and the Curriculum’, in Richard Teese and John Polesel, 2003, Undemocratic Schooling: Equity and Quality in Mass Secondary Education in Australia, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, pp. 118–30. Teese and Polesel’s research shows that ‘access to selective schools provides relief from the dangers of failure which the more demanding aspects of the upper secondary curriculum represent’. Mac.Rob, then, one of only two selective state high schools in Victoria, became important for families wanting to counter the effect of class and socio-economic background on their daughters’ academic success.
58 Blackmore, Making Educational History, p. 71. See also pp. 55–96.
To Gwen Bowles it became a matter of concern that girls were not taking advantage of the opportunities made possible by changes such as the Equal Opportunity Act of 1977. In her mind, change itself had little value unless girls took advantage of what it offered them—and that meant increasing their awareness of possible career destinations for women.\footnote{G. M. Bowles, Principal’s Report, Pallas, 1977. For an examination of the outcomes of the Girls, Schools and Society report, see Alison Mackinnon, ‘Girls Schools and Society: a Generation of Change?’, Clare Burton Lecture delivered at the Mercury Cinema, Adelaide, 23 November 2005. This lecture was also delivered at other universities, RMIT University, Melbourne included.} Mac.Rob’s reputation as a broad pathway to university was seriously at risk if ‘the soft subjects’ dominated courses studied. This trend had to be counteracted if Mac.Rob was to maintain and improve its academic credentials. According to the former principal, staffing at the time reflected the subjects being studied. Nevertheless, she explains, Mac.Rob also needed more teachers qualified and experienced in the maths and the sciences in order to encourage the girls to take up those subjects.\footnote{Interview with Gwen Bowles, 19 September 2003.} The problem of shortages in these areas, however, was continued into the twenty-first century.

The difficulty of securing qualified teachers (particularly for the all-important year 12), which had surfaced during the Barrett era, continued into the 1970s and 1980s, and, according to Gwen Bowles, she had frequent confrontations with the Education Department over staffing issues. What does a principal do, she asks, when she is sent a teacher of German whose only experience has been in teaching air force recruits and who is unable to teach German to school girls? How do you reassure students that they can expect to have access to quality teaching? Good teachers were crucial for the final year of schooling if girls were to be successful at the university examinations and secure scholarships and entry to their preferred courses. Competition was a stark reality by the 1970s, as the research of Richard Teese and John Polesel demonstrates,\footnote{Teese and Polesel, Undemocratic Schooling, pp. 119–20.} and a pass mark was no longer enough to secure a university scholarship or teaching studentship. Excellence mattered.

Bowles solved the problem of a teacher of German by approaching a former student, a native speaker, and asking her to take over the teaching of Matriculation German. It was a ‘big ask’ and one requiring judicious adjustment of the staffing schedule, but the appointment was a brilliant success declared the former principal.\footnote{Interview with Gwen Bowles, 19 September 2003.} What happened to the original teacher? He was moved to the junior classes, thus creating tiers of competencies. In 1980, however, there was further uncertainty among many staff members, and one teacher was declared in excess for the following year because of new staffing appointments.
Through all of this uncertainty and change, Gwen Bowles used *Pallas* and regular school bulletins to keep families in touch with what was happening within education generally and in the school specifically, particularly as changes in educational policies affected the teaching staff.\(^6\)

An emphasis on teacher professional development characterised the 1970s and 1980s as assessment changed alongside curriculum, and the Leaving examination was abandoned, allowing secondary schools the freedom to design their own courses of study. Amidst all of this, Bowles decided that a rationalisation of teaching loads was necessary. It was important, she argued, that the load be shared equally, so she combined small classes to redress inequalities. As a result, any teacher who had felt immune from challenge and change at Mac.Rob up to that point had a rude awakening, and resistance grew as some teachers fought those changes.\(^6\)

The gender and cultural mix of the Mac.Rob staff also altered in the 1970s. More males were appointed to the staff, and teachers who had been born in continental Europe took up appointments, supplementing appointments of the previous decades, including Marta Rado, who taught mainly languages. In thinking about this decades later, Bowles argued that such changes were good for the school as new ideas and experiences enriched school life—Mac.Rob could not afford to stagnate if it wanted to achieve academic excellence for its students. In her opinion, new staff meant that the curriculum could be broadened to include the new subjects and courses on offer at the universities.\(^6\) These staffing changes were memorable for students on the one hand, and threatening to some teachers on the other. Former students from the 1970s (and from the 1950s and 1960s) share happy memories of teachers who, because of their European background, appeared exciting, fresh, romantic, outspoken and intellectual. That said, one of the most popular characters of the era was Bob Harrison, Mac.Rob’s first male assistant principal. The Bowles and Harrison team was a successful partnership from all accounts, and Bob Harrison went down in history as the first male to lead Mac.Rob (when his principal was on long service leave) since the school had split along gender lines in 1927.

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\(^6\) See Principal’s Reports, *Pallas* 1972–84.
\(^6\) Interview with Gwen Bowles, 19 September 2003.
\(^6\) Interview with Gwen Bowles, 19 September 2003.
Bursting at the seams

Mac.Rob was badly in need of refurbishment when Gwen Bowles began her principalship. Little, according to the former principal in 2003, had been done in the way of capital works between 1934 and 1972 other than the completion of the new school library, the Barrett-Carr library. It was one of Nina Carr’s deepest regrets that she was unable to set in motion much needed refurbishment and extensions during her principalship, and, when Gwen Bowles arrived, the school was indeed bursting at the seams. Former students recall attending classes in storerooms and corridors on occasion (from as early as the 1960s), and a lack of space meant that science and domestic science teaching continued in substandard facilities and conditions into the next decade.

Music, Gwen Bowles’ particular interest and forte, was also subject to lack of space. Mac.Rob had seen some outstanding musical groups’ achievements over the decades, but, when Bowles went to Mac.Rob, there was no music program such as there is at present. Most of the music rooms in the 1970s were storerooms. Imagine getting a piano into a storeroom that for decades had held chalk and other materials regularly oversupplied by the Department. When the storerooms proved inadequate, music lessons were conducted at the back of the hall—‘Every space was used for something’. At that time, according to Bowles, Mac.Rob had the fortune to become one of a group of music schools allocated a good part of the overall regional music budget, and was able to gain the services of instrumental teachers as a result. This facilitated the growth of a school orchestra and smaller instrumental groups. Unfortunately, Bowles adds, being a part of the group of music schools brought criticism from other high schools that were beginning to feel the pressure of competition as a result of the growth spurt in mass secondary education towards the end of the 1970s. The pursuit of excellence in the state education bureaucracy was a complicated process.

Central schools

One of the most important, and complex, issues Gwen Bowles faced early in her principalship involved the central schools. These schools, also known as feeder schools,
were set up in the 1930s and provided the main pathway to Mac.Rob and Melbourne High School. The central schools that fed Mac.Rob were located mainly in the middle class belt in the eastern and south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne. Richard Teese, a leading researcher of mass secondary schooling in Australia, states that parents in the 1970s uprooted and moved their families to these areas to give their children greater opportunity to get into the better academic state high schools.\(^9\) He also argues that the students from the central schools were academically competent\(^70\)—a valid argument in the context of secondary education generally—but a matter for doubt by the 1970s in Bowles’ experience.

Just as the very first students at the Continuation School in 1905 required a school principal’s recommendation for entry, students at the central schools relied on a principal’s recommendation to get into Mac.Rob. There was a problem with this, according to Bowles. In her experience, recommendations were ultimately highly subjective (especially when principals disagreed on definitions of academic ability), and there were no clear and enforceable guidelines to ensure that only girls who had the academic ability would be referred to Mac.Rob. Mac.Rob saw itself as an academic school, and potential students needed to fit into that culture. According to Bowles, however, a central school principal might recommend a student because he wanted her to have the opportunity to attend Mac.Rob to redress disadvantage and improve her employment prospects. So, too, a parent might put pressure on a central school principal to recommend a daughter, or a principal, in a mood of egalitarianism, might just recommend every girl, irrespective of ability or examination results. This created serious problems for Mac.Rob in the former principal’s opinion, because some students came in without the necessary academic background. As a consequence, Bowles called in the psychology and guidance branch of the Education Department to assist staff in designing special programs to cater for these students. This had the effect of reducing staff numbers available to teach the more competent students, but, Bowles reflects, teachers went out of their way to learn new skills and strategies in their own time and helped students out of normal school hours to improve their standard of work.\(^71\)

The unsystematic method of recommending girls from central schools triggered a change in the dynamics of the student population in the 1970s, although it may have begun to happen.

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\(^70\) Teese, ‘Gender and Class’, p. 258.

\(^71\) Interview with Gwen Bowles, 19 September 2003.
during Nina Carr’s time as principal. Central school students made up approximately 70 per cent of Mac.Rob enrolments at the time and, according to Gwen Bowles, a good proportion of those girls had difficulty settling into the Mac.Rob culture, their presence causing discipline problems.\textsuperscript{72} This was in addition to the problem of girls coming in without the academic competencies, although there would have been some behavioural issues associated with that as well. Many aspects of Mac.Rob were unfamiliar to them and there were clashes as a result. ‘They just did not fit in.’\textsuperscript{73} For some girls, it must have been like entering a foreign country with its different culture, different work ethos, different language and often different social values. There was always, too, a proportion of girls for whom Mac.Rob was the local high school—girls from South Melbourne and Middle Park for example. This was before those areas became gentrified and middle class. Many of these girls were admitted to the school regardless of academic performance or ability.\textsuperscript{74}

Pupil welfare

During Gwen Bowles’ principalship, pupil welfare services expanded out of necessity, just as it had during the Depression years. Student welfare was important to Bowles as principal and, she reflects, she had the ability to sense when a girl was troubled and was thus able to identify many in need of support (something that Christina Montgomery and Mary Hutton had also achieved). Former assistant principal R. J. (Bob) Harrison also noted this sensitivity on the occasion of Bowles’ retirement: ‘She could pick a girl who had become unhappy at home by the deterioration in her personal appearance and would give that girl every assistance in solving her problems’.\textsuperscript{75} As Bowles herself puts it, ‘A girl might have had a difficult relationship with her father for example, one in which the only communication was constant angry confrontation. It might have been a case of sexual abuse or a case of a daughter confused when she learned that her mother ran a brothel.’\textsuperscript{76} Kelsey Puckridge, who related the story of the crazed intruder in Daphne Barrett’s time, recalled in her interview that a clash of cultures created ongoing problems for some students. Greek girls, for example, might move between two very different worlds: the world of school with its mix of Australian, Jewish, Russian and other European cultures, and the world at home where Greek tradition reigned. According to Puckridge and Bowles, some Greek girls

\textsuperscript{72} Former teachers I spoke with confirm this but did not wish to have their names included in the history.
\textsuperscript{73} Interview with Gwen Bowles, 19 September 2003.
\textsuperscript{74} Interview with Gwen Bowles, 19 September 2003.
\textsuperscript{75} R.J. Harrison, \textit{Pallas}, 1984.
\textsuperscript{76} These examples represent real experiences Bowles dealt with as principal.
found themselves under intense scrutiny because of their gender and some faced the added pressure of parents’ often unreasonable ambitions for them.\textsuperscript{77}

**The making of women at Mac.Rob 1972–1984**

It was the rebellion over the issue of the wearing of school uniform that Gwen Bowles pinpoints as a critical point in her headship. This action by a group of girls, according to the former principal, signalled a general mood of resistance among some students. It is interesting in light of this to see how Bowles approached the question of discipline, given that girls had generally been well behaved and accepting (or quietly tolerant of) the school traditions and conventions in the past. According to Bowles, if a girl ‘played up’, she would quietly remind the offender that she did not have to be at Mac.Rob if she did not want to be there. This is significant in illustrating how central was the idea of privilege in Mac.Rob’s identity. To the former principal, writing for the final time in *Pallas* in 1984, ‘A girl either accepts or rejects the education that has been provided for her’, and she confirmed in her interview for this history a conviction that ‘Mac.Rob does not suit everyone’.\textsuperscript{78}

Gwen Bowles was confident and clear in her ideas about girls’ education, as her articles in *Pallas* and school newsletters throughout her thirteen years as principal reveal. In using these forums to disseminate her message to the broader school community, she emphasised civic responsibility and leadership in the context of what was happening in the broader society. That education was a privilege was a major point, and Bowles expressed her belief that every girl who enjoyed this privilege had a responsibility to give something to the community in return. It was a girl’s duty as a citizen, she argued, to make a worthwhile contribution to society, and to build on the solid foundations of the past, working to strengthen moral standards in the community, and always maintaining high standards themselves.\textsuperscript{79} In 1975, International Women’s Year, Gwen Bowles was encouraging Mac.Rob girls to think about political careers, urging them to continue the tradition of leadership within the community. Her messages were always underpinned by a deep sense of responsibility for others within the context of social change and general uncertainty:

As women are gaining rights they should put themselves into positions where using these rights can have some effect. Go into parliament now that it is

\textsuperscript{77} Interview with Kelsey Puckridge, 12 March 2003.
\textsuperscript{78} Interview with Gwen Bowles, 19 September 2003.
\textsuperscript{79} Interview with Gwen Bowles, 19 September 2003.
possible, be leaders and lead. Be mothers if that is what you want and be good mothers for motherhood is important because the first years of a child’s life are when good habits and attitudes are formed and the feeling of security gained.\textsuperscript{80}

In retrospect, Gwen Bowles ‘practised what she preached’ as an educationist, and continues to do so in retirement. Her courage in her convictions and the experience of a lifetime as a woman in education stand out when discussing her life history. She is a member of the Business and Professional Women’s Association and was part of its committee that organised a special Pioneer Women’s Window at St James’ Old Cathedral, one of Melbourne’s oldest churches. Her love of music continues, and she is not afraid to voice her opinions about the quality of the music at Mac.Rob speech nights. Some people have found her directness confronting, but equally it is also valued by many, including her successors. Gabrielle Blood, for example, explains that she knew that she could rely on her predecessor’s perspective, and called on her advice soon after taking over as principal in 1985. Gwen Bowles continues to express interest in hearing about what Mac.Rob girls do in life, and an encounter with her reveals integrity and frankness as well as rich contextual knowledge.

Perhaps the words of former teacher and original school archivist, Monica Jacomb will serve as a fitting tribute. Monica believes that her former principal reinvigorated her life by giving her the stimulating task of setting up a school archive, often suggesting possible interview subjects. ‘Any principal can get good results from good staff. Miss Bowles got excellent results from excellent staff. I think that by the end of 1984 Miss Bowles may have seen Mac.Rob as [current principal] Ms Jane Garvey described her first year in 2004 —as a principal’s paradise’. According to Jacomb, ‘Miss Bowles retired in 1984. She worked at the school until 5 pm on the last day and went home with a migraine and 317 unused sick days’.\textsuperscript{81}

Gwen Bowles had a final important message for the Mac.Rob school community as she prepared to hand over the reins of leadership to her successor, Gabrielle Blood. The future of the school was yet again under threat in 1984 and she spelled out clearly what the community needed to do in response: ‘Looking forward, I have some doubts about the

\textsuperscript{80} Interview with Gwen Bowles, 19 September 2003.
\textsuperscript{81} M. Jacomb, E-mail narrative, 18 July 2005.
future. Once again our year 9 to year 12 school is under threat. I hope that there will be enough people ready to fight to keep Mac.Rob as it is’. 

**Gabrielle Blood**

**1985-1996**

*Miss Blood came to the school at a time when it was under threat.*

Assistant principal, Margaret Akins

*I have quite a vivid memory of her interview. She was the first interviewee on a Saturday morning. [She was] early for her appointment. Certainly we kept her waiting and when she came in she made an off-the-cuff remark about the incredible toilet in Staff Room One…installed as part of a bathroom complex when it was believed that General McArthur himself would use Mac.Rob during the American occupation of the school in World War II.*

Susan Sherson (Terry), as a member of the principal selection panel.

*Not much happens around the school that she doesn’t know about.*

Susan Sherson (Terry)

*Right through my time as principal I would try to convey to staff the importance of valuing the girls as people, letting them know you cared about them as people and not just about grades they got.*

Gabrielle Blood, 2004

Like Nina Carr, Gabrielle Blood had already spent time at Mac.Rob before returning in 1985 as principal. She was, however, by her own frank admission, unimpressed enough with the school to omit it on any applications for transfer and promotion until the principal’s position came up in 1984. In the early 1950s, it just did not appeal to her with its austere atmosphere and hierarchy of staff rooms that relegated a budding young teacher to the back of a science room completely separate from school life. Thirty years later in

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84 S. Sherson (Terry), *PN*, October 1996.
85 S. Sherson (Terry), *PN*, October 1996.
86 Interview with Gabrielle Blood, 4 September 2003.
87 There was nothing unusual in this because there were far fewer state high schools to go to and teachers often returned to their old school, or school at which they had completed a teaching round.
88 Interview with Gabrielle Blood, 4 September 2003.
1984, Blood’s impressions of Mac.Rob at her interview for the principalship were of ‘cold and primitiveness’; an impression shared by others remembering the school. ‘The grey linoleum of the entrance foyer created a prison-like environment and the school interior was in sore need of a coat of paint. The administration area had little to impress with its bare floors and out-of-date equipment’, she reminisces. Gabrielle Blood remained at Mac.Rob for eleven years, nonetheless, almost as long as her predecessor Gwen Bowles.

Gabrielle Blood, the oldest of five children (four girls and a boy), attended the Holy Redeemer Catholic Primary School in Surrey Hills until year seven. Classes averaged a hundred girls and boys but she was a bright student—in her memory, a girl who could read and do things. She was accelerated to higher class levels early in her schooling years—that was until her mother insisted that she be removed from fifth grade and returned to the fourth grade to be with children her own age. After completing primary school Blood moved with her family to Hawthorn to live with her mother’s parents. At Holy Redeemer Central School in Surrey Hills she trained for a junior government scholarship along with girls drawn mainly from other Catholic primary schools. There she found herself in the same class as Germaine Greer, and remembers her former classmate ‘testing Sister Lily’s patience sorely with her endless questions’. Blood eventually moved on to Presentation Convent, Windsor, a Catholic girls’ secondary school, a long way from home. She could have gone elsewhere, she states—to the more academic star of the Sea Convent at Gardenvale, for example, but, a determined girl, she refused to leave her friends and so had to accept lengthy travel times each day. It was at Windsor that the young student was introduced to Latin, which would become her passion throughout her secondary schooling and university years.

Gabrielle Blood decided to be a teacher when she was still a child. As many children do, she explains, she would come home from school and conduct classes for her young siblings, drawing on her own schooling experiences as a model. When she reached year ten she applied for a secondary teaching studentship: ‘I could not afford the cost of a university education without one.’ Her family desperately needed the financial assistance a

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89 Interview with Gabrielle Blood, 4 September 2003.
90 Interview with Gabrielle Blood, 4 September 2003.
91 Interview with Gabrielle Blood, 4 September 2003.
92 Interview with Gabrielle Blood, 4 September 2003. Lengthy travel times to and from Mac.Rob has been a continuous theme throughout its history, with some girls leaving the school because the travel became too much for them. See school enrolment registers 1990-95, MGHS Archive, which reveal that this remains an issue to consider when thinking about attending Mac.Rob.
93 Interview with Gabrielle Blood, 4 September 2003.
studentship would bring, and she did not want to be a burden to them. Blood decided, in the end, not to join the Education Department at that stage. She headed off to university on a Commonwealth Scholarship instead, suggesting that she wanted something different for herself, something less confined than the restrictions that came with a teaching studentship. This, she remembers, created a real financial battle for her family because her sisters and brother were at different stages of primary and secondary schooling at the time. So, at the end of her first year at university, she changed her mind about teaching and applied for a studentship, perhaps a small price to pay to achieve a university qualification and earlier financial independence. She really had few choices if she wanted a university degree, and a strong drive by the Education Department to recruit young women and men to train as secondary teachers meant that university places were more accessible in the late 1950s. At the University of Melbourne she completed an honours degree in Latin followed by a Diploma of Education with teaching methods in Latin, French and history. She was well qualified for a teaching career.

During a teaching round at Mac.Rob, Blood found the girls very cooperative but, she divulges, ‘I did not enjoy the atmosphere there.’ Student teachers were very much second-class citizens, serving their apprenticeships and learning how the system worked, and they were often denied the comfort of staff rooms and positioned in far less salubrious places. Gabrielle Blood’s first appointment after graduation was as French teacher at Echuca High School. Initially, she explains, she was to be accommodated in the Shamrock Hotel before the sisters from the nearby Catholic convent saved the day by recommending a family with whom she could board. In 1964 she took a year off to travel overseas (she travelled by cargo ship) once she had fulfilled the conditions of her studentship bond to teach for three years in the Education Department.

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94 All winners of studentships were required to enter into a bond with the Education Department to teach for three years, otherwise they would have to repay money allocated to them during their training. This often happened when women married after completing courses.


96 Interview with Gabrielle Blood, 4 September 2003. One group of former students revealed in an interview that, in the 1960s, they went out of their way to behave impeccably for their student teachers, particularly when they were being assessed. P. Parker’s journal, 2004.

97 For Blood, it was the back of a science classroom where she used to knit after completing her lesson preparations. It would have been very cold in winter and smelly from daily lessons. Many women teachers who trained before the 1980s recall the ad hoc places they were given to work in privately and eat their lunches during teaching rounds—myself included.
When Blood returned from teaching in the United Kingdom,\(^98\) she was posted to Dandenong High School. This posting was particularly memorable, she maintains, not just because the school boasted quite vocal union members that included Barry Jones, later a Labor MP. To her, a young woman just back from overseas travel, it was a vibrant place, ‘because of the influence of immigrants from Europe’, particularly in the wake of the Russian invasion of Hungary in 1956. ‘There were Dutch people in south Dandenong and others from Russia and the Ukraine, and music figured strongly in the lives of the school community.’\(^99\) Her next school, Cheltenham High School, modelled on Cheltenham College in England, was ‘very middle class’. It was ‘unexciting by comparison’, although she enjoyed her seven years there. ‘Cheltenham in the 1960s’, she spells out, ‘was a stark cultural change from Dandenong, with its emphasis on middle class externals such as uniform and appearance.’\(^100\) A transfer to Albert Park High School with its many Greek and Turkish families subsequently challenged her middle class style and standards, and she remembers struggling to find common ground with the students. She also had teaching stints at Balwyn High School, and, eventually, she was appointed principal at Lyndale High School in north Dandenong, a school established in 1961. From there she was advancing towards Mac.Rob, although she did intentionally not set that path for herself.

**Heading Mac.Rob**

It was a Saturday morning when Gabrielle Blood attended the interview for the principal’s position at Mac.Rob following Gwen Bowles’ decision to retire. She recalls her first impressions of Mac.Rob:

I surprised Chris Kelly (VCE co-ordinator), the school council representative on the selection panel, as I was early. I thought I would use the toilet and…it was terrible. I’d never been to a place that’s as primitive as this. I couldn’t get over the shocking conditions as I never thought you’d have anything like that in a school. I had never seen anything quite like Mac.Rob and I couldn’t believe that you couldn’t do something about it. Little did I know.\(^101\)

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\(^98\) Blood’s experiences of teaching in the United Kingdom are fascinating and suggest that taking a year off to work overseas was no simple matter, particularly as she has to find work to support herself and her travels. According To Blood, she just did not suit some positions that were open to her —infant class teaching, for example.

\(^99\) Interview with Gabrielle Blood, 4 September 2003.

\(^100\) Interview with Gabrielle Blood, 4 September 2003.

Blood was reluctant to take over the headship at Mac.Rob immediately after her appointment since she had been at Lyndale for just two and a half years and she felt obliged to serve out the remainder of the year at least. But under pressure from the president of the Mac.Rob school council, Tom Warr (a dedicated and selfless man who served on council longer than any one else), she agreed to take up her appointment the following term. Her leadership was needed desperately, as Mac.Rob’s future was once more under threat. The Education Department had put both it and Melbourne High School on notice that they were under review. As a result, both schools would need to justify their existence as selective entry schools. If they could not, they faced becoming comprehensive state high schools and the loss of their historical identity.

With the review hanging over her head, the new principal prioritised one other task – redressing the dismal conditions of the administration offices, the first port of call for anyone coming into the school. Blood recalls the general office, dim and poorly equipped with its old-fashioned spirit duplicator and ancient Fordigraph machine. She also evokes images of depressingly bleak corridors leading to the administration area, corridors ‘covered in institutional grey linoleum’. She set about carpeting the entire area and arranged for the school to be painted. ‘This was the leading school in the state and it was in this condition,’ she explains, frustration embedded in her tone. She was determined to redress these immediate concerns as quickly as she could, within budgetary constraints of course.

Girls, change and identity

School policy in Victoria during the eighties has been directed by the findings and the recommendations of the Report into Post-compulsory Schools (Blackburn Report). One of the aims outlined in the Report was to increase post compulsory retention rates in government schools to seventy-five per cent by 1995.

Gabrielle Blood is frank that the best part of being at Mac.Rob was the girls—the students. Her memories of her first less-than-salubrious experience of Mac.Rob as a teacher-in-training were quickly subsumed by her experiences of the girls in the day-to-day life of the school. She offers a poignant example:

The first assembly stands out in my mind. I will never forget that. The first time I walked on stage at that assembly in that tall, narrow hall and there were girls from floor to ceiling in their uniforms. They stood up and they sang the school song. It was paradise. It was something you never fail to be moved by.\textsuperscript{105}

The girls presented some challenges too—they were not passive women in the making according to the former principal. Blood illustrates her point using the annual school formal (dance) as an example. ‘The school had been through a period of great upheaval and radicalism in Miss Bowles’ time and now the big issue was the social. The girls wanted to have it at Tudor Court because the school hall was too small and lacking in proper facilities.’\textsuperscript{106} The venue was approved, but, the former principal recalls, she and Dorothy McNair, the assistant principal, still caught a few boys drinking alcohol in the garden amongst the bushes. Vigilance was necessary even though girls were being given opportunities to make decisions for themselves.

With the school under review, Blood pressured the Education Department into providing an extra staff member to assist in preparing the school’s submission. This, she explains, freed up teachers Chris Kelly and Robin Rivett, who were both on school council at the time, enabling them to assist in the gathering and analysis of data for the submission, in cooperation with MHS.\textsuperscript{107} What prompted the review and what did it mean for Mac.Rob in the Victorian educational landscape? According to Gabrielle Blood, a change of government at state level was the trigger and Mac.Rob found itself in the new Labor government’s firing line ‘because of its perceived elitism’. She elaborates: ‘The period saw the beginning of government pruning of resources and cutting back on education expenditure, and it was widely believed that Mac.Rob and MHS were bleeding the others schools of their best students, in some cases affecting the gender composition of enrolments.’\textsuperscript{108}

As control of education moved slowly from the traditional centre made up of the universities and the centralised Education Department bureaucracy out to locally managed...
schools within regions (decentralisation), schools came into competition with one another in a more overt way, Blood explains. They were in competition for resources for both curriculum development and staffing in order to implement some of the recommendations of the highly influential Blackburn Report, which had recommended that the Higher School Certificate (HSC) be scrapped and replaced with a two-year general education certificate. According to Gabrielle Blood, Mac.Rob’s geographical position became an important issue as a result of this report because the school, which drew in students from across the state, lacked a local catchment area. There were also limits on class sizes, a product of the ‘landlocked’ Mac.Rob’s inability to expand its facilities. Mac.Rob’s future was tenuous at the very least if it could not expand and develop in the pursuit of general excellence and success at the university examinations.

The schools that acted as the main feeder schools for Mac.Rob and MHS, the central schools, also came under review in 1985 and they too had to justify their existence. This, claims Blood, had ramifications for Mac.Rob in the sense that a decision had to be made about school entry arrangements. ‘Mac.Rob was forced to examine its identity closely, in particular its commitment to being a single-sex school, and this had to be negotiated within the politics of contemporary educational debates in the 1980s.’ Central to these was the idea of equal opportunity, which, Blood observes, underpinned the educational changes taking place at the time. The Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), which replaced the HSC following the publication of the Blackburn Report was driven by ideals about ‘equality of outcomes’ and ‘equality of opportunity’. The Blackburn Report was significant for post-compulsory schooling in Victoria as it called for a common credential that could meet the needs of the majority of students by offering a broader curriculum, broader than the curriculum that catered for tertiary entrance. It also called for the amalgamation of traditional high and technical schools into comprehensive high schools. In response to the release of the Blackburn Report, Mac.Rob’s school council co-opted former students Susan Sherson and Carly Strachan to lend Palladians’ support as the school set about considering

109 Department of School Education, 1985, Ministerial Review of Post-compulsory Schooling, Melbourne. This report was popularly known as the Blackburn Report and it effectively established the Victorian Certificate of Education. Jean Blackburn was one of those educationists unable to get work in the public policy sphere during the 1950s because of her previous association with the communist party. The Blackburn Report was issued on 1 May 1985 and it recommended the abolition of external examinations, and that high and technical schools be amalgamated into comprehensive schools. The report recommended further sweeping curriculum changes. For biographical detail on Blackburn see Dr. Jean Blackburn, Australian Women’s Archive Project, http://www.womenaustralia.info/biogs/AWE0332b.htm, accessed 20 July 2005.


its options in light of the report’s recommendations. Under Gabrielle Blood’s direction, Mac.Rob argued that it aimed to give opportunities to girls with potential, who would not otherwise shine in different secondary schools. At the time, girls were being outperformed by boys in science and mathematics, and the idea of single-sex classes was being discussed within educational circles as a strategy to improve girls’ academic outcomes in these subjects.112

Mac.Rob’s strategy, according to Blood, was to draw in students more widely in order to reduce the pressure on the schools within the metropolitan south central region from which students had mostly been coming. ‘The school now stated that it would take in students from a broader area, so long as they contributed to the life of the school and took an active part in it.’ The idea was that Mac.Rob should not become a mere ticket to university. The entrance examination, Blood continues, was a very blunt instrument for achieving this purpose; selection criteria that combined examination, interview, reference and profile, whilst desirable, were impractical, and an element of compromise was inevitable.113

The outcome of the review was the ‘three per cent rule’, part of the Strategy Plan for South Central Region that sought to protect the viability of comprehensive high schools.114 According to Blood, and as explained by her predecessor Gwen Bowles, the idea behind the three per cent rule was that no more than three per cent of the year eight enrolment of any school could be accepted into Mac.Rob and MHS combined. Automatic entrance from the central schools ceased, which caused the school communities great distress and threatened significantly their identities, value and position within the state education system. The three per cent rule meant that as few as one student could now qualify for entrance to Mac.Rob and MHS from a central school, so small did their year eight student numbers become in comparison with the high schools. Furthermore, the three per cent rule was not gender

based, Blood adds, which meant that sometimes Mac.Rob did not get any students from a particular school at all if boys dominated that catchment—thus, in her opinion, testing the argument that Mac.Rob was skimming off the best students from Melbourne’s high schools. ‘But the figure was also open to manipulation’, Blood comments. She asserts that ‘the argument that Mac.Rob skimmed off the top students does not hold water’ because ‘parents had a great deal to do with enrolments’, something that was perhaps not well recognised in the 1980s and into the 1990s. What this meant was that there continued a preference for educating boys over girls in the 1980s. A parent might send a son to a private school with the view of getting him into MHS, whereas a daughter might be sent to a high school to balance out the financial cost.\textsuperscript{116}

Publicising Mac.Rob proved difficult in the Blood era. Informing parents of Mac.Rob’s existence was often a wasted effort, the former principal observes, because some secondary schools (for understandable reasons) did not distribute the materials sent to advertise the school. Thus the information about the entry process was not made available to prospective students and families. According to Blood, ‘Sometimes the school received abusive calls from principals accusing us of taking more than three per cent, and other times there would be entreaties to accept a deserving student.’ Perceptions that Mac.Rob was targeting the best students in state high schools may not have been accurately informed in any case, Blood argues, for entry was not easy and many girls were not prepared for the level of mathematics required, as their examination results revealed. Mac.Rob’s ambition to achieve academic excellence at the university examinations was directly affected by the problem of girls not studying mathematics and sciences. The competitive curriculum was tied to the university examinations, and a state high school espousing intellectual equality with males could not be achieved without facilitating a full science curriculum equal to that offered in private and corporate schools.\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{115} Interview with Gabrielle Blood, 11 September 2003.
\textsuperscript{116} Interview with Gabrielle Blood, 11 September 2003. Women who were interviewed for this history often mentioned the fact that their brothers attended private schools, with some also attending MHS, which was considered as elite as the private boys’ schools.
\textsuperscript{117} See M. Theobald, 1987, ‘Humanities, Science and the Female Mind: An Historical Perspective’, \emph{Unicorn}, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 162-65. See also Cherry Collins, Jane Kenway and Julie McLeod, 2000, \emph{Factors Influencing the Educational Performance of Males and Females in School and their Initial Destinations after Leaving School}, Report Commissioned by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Deakin University Press, Geelong. This is an important report that examines issues highly relevant to Mac.Rob, including performance outcomes based on being (or not being) a single-sex school and being a selective school rather than a comprehensive high school.
Mac.Rob came through the review process successfully, no mean feat during a period of wide support for comprehensive schools. Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School was formally reclassified as a state-wide provider of secondary education—a classification that linked it with its roots in 1905, when, as the Melbourne Continuation School, it was able to draw in students from across Victoria. It was a significant achievement and one that enabled the school to secure its identity as a selective, single-sex state provider of secondary education.

**Leading**

As was the experience of some who had led the school before her, Gabrielle Blood encountered considerable resistance to some of the changes she attempted to effect as principal, in particular, changes in attitude about Mac.Rob. While the school council had given her a mandate to implement change, this was not necessarily what the regional director had in mind when he suggested that Mac.Rob’s educational policies and ethos should reflect government policies more clearly. The perception was, according to Blood, that Mac.Rob saw itself as somehow separate from the state secondary school system and she understood that her first task was to go in to bat for Mac.Rob as it stood. One aspect of this was the selective entry policy. As Blood remembers it, about thirty-three per cent of Mac.Rob’s enrolments still came from the central schools in the early 1980s, and the former principal soon came to realise, as had Gwen Bowles before her, that not all these girls could cope with the academic standard at Mac.Rob. Blood set about devising an entry policy that reflected Mac.Rob’s identity as an academic school, but one, she explains, that also took into account the fact that performance would be affected by the schools that girls had previously attended. A major question in the then principal’s mind was how to select students fairly from less academically successful schools to ensure true equity of access, given that Mac.Rob no longer had a commercial stream in the mid-1980s. Clearly, students seeking entry needed to want a professional academic education—that is, potential students’ aspirations needed to correspond to the school’s aims to build a successful academic community.

According to Gabrielle Blood, the entry process was difficult and required rationalisation. There were also complexities that had to be taken into account. Some parents, she explains,

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were reluctant to allow their daughters to sit the entrance examination because success would mean long distances to travel. Then again, she adds, parents who were former Mac.Rob students, and who might be expected to want their daughters to attend Mac.Rob seemed to prefer private schools for them, whereas MHS old boys were more likely to seek to send their sons to their old school. At one point, Blood continues, Mac.Rob’s status as a music school added to the complexities of the selective-entry process. The music schools included Blackburn, McLeod, McKinnon, Balwyn and University high schools. There was a central music curriculum with each school receiving an allocation of instrumental teachers over and above its normal staffing entitlement. These teachers were required to teach the prescribed music curriculum as part of the arrangement. There was a price to pay, however, Blood notes, because other secondary schools resented the privileges of this small group of schools because they lost students to them. But, she concludes, once the three per cent rule came in, every girl had to sit the entrance examination regardless of musical ability, and gradually the music places disappeared.\textsuperscript{120}

Mac.Rob’s selective status brought with it a range of problems that threatened the selection process itself as people sought to find ways to manipulate that process. There was, for example, Blood extrapolates, an attempt by a coaching college to obtain information about the entrance examinations so that they could coach girls to pass the exams. ‘Parents too,’ she continues, ‘might pressure a teacher or an acquaintance of a teacher to get a competitive advantage for their daughters.’ The entrance tests were tough, according to the former principal, particularly after the Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER) began to set them, but, with the implementation of the three per cent rule, students accepted into the school were not always the ones who scored the highest marks. Thus there were still some who found it difficult to meet the academic standards of the school.\textsuperscript{121}

In her annual report in \textit{Pallas} in 1987, Gabrielle Blood reminded the school community that schools historically face pressure from society in times of social change, particularly when there is high unemployment. In response to the pressure of unemployment on Mac.Rob girls during the late 1980s and the first half of the 1990s, she wrote that a girl could expect to have several career changes during the course of her life. She then drew on the words of the school’s founding principal, Joseph Hocking, to remind everyone what

\textsuperscript{120} Interview with Gabrielle Blood, 11 September 2003.
\textsuperscript{121} Interview with Gabrielle Blood, 11 September 2003.
education was ultimately about: ‘A school is not a place where knowledge is said, but where is taught the art of life.’

Gabrielle Blood’s headship can be viewed, perhaps, in terms of the two questions she posed in the above report: ‘Which career’ and ‘what is suitable preparation?’ Schooling would always play a significant role in answering both questions because of the relationship between education and work. As she argues, increasingly schools were becoming places where solutions to society’s problems were played out, and the curriculum must reflect this by offering subjects including drug awareness, environmental studies and road safety education. Gabrielle Blood, like her predecessors, saw education as an important means of imparting moral principles that placed the good of others, society and the environment ahead of personal desires, impulses and ambitions.

The idea that education was a privilege that came with a duty to society continued as Mac.Rob moved towards the twenty-first century. In her role as principal, Gabrielle Blood was a realist, though with a strong feeling and deep respect for ideals, who constantly promoted the value of education, not merely for economic recovery, but for the future. To her, achievement and excellence were important goals, but, she contends, ‘Our schools…must provide challenge and stimulation for talented young people to enter public life and help provide the vision which our country needs’. Education at Mac.Rob throughout the Blood era was thus as much about personal development, citizenship and educating society’s future leaders as it was about employment, acquiring new ways of thinking, and new technologies.

In 1993, Mac.Rob became a pilot school in the Schools of the Future program, a program that emphasised ‘quality, excellence and choice in education’. As principal, Gabrielle Blood led thirty-five members of the school community in the collaborative planning of Mac.Rob’s future. According to Blood, the group agreed to retain Mac.Rob’s identity as a state-wide selective entry girls’ school, whilst confirming its ethos, its diverse ethnic and socio-economic mix, and its geographical location close to the city centre. Blood emphasised in her annual report in Pallas 1993, that girls came to Mac.Rob seeking something special, seeking ‘challenge in their studies’. She linked girls’ career prospects with the increasing marketisation of education, pointing out that the Schools of the Future planning group understood that Mac.Rob would need to maintain a competitive edge in the

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The provision of a comprehensive (broad) curriculum was thus a major issue, along with the need to boost enrolments to increase the VCE cohort to five hundred students, something that would make Mac.Rob more competitive as well as redress the imbalance in numbers between it and MHS. It was within the Schools of the Future program that Mac.Rob’s future was clearly determined, and in *Pallas* 1993 she spelled out her belief: ‘Greater advantage must be taken of existing links with the business world and tertiary institutions, and new avenues, such as sponsorship and the marketing of educational programs, must also be explored. The development of a stronger and more identifiable alumni association and a planned and aggressive approach to marketing the school are also priorities.’

In order to move in these new directions, extensive building work had to be carried out at the Albert Park premises. Mac.Rob had coped with limited facilities throughout its existence, girls and teachers even having to move back and forth across Kings Way when the school leased two floors of Galaxy House in Bowen Crescent (the first floor in 1991 and the second in 1994) in its efforts to continue to provide the kind of education it had always espoused. In the meantime, as her annual reports detail, Blood set out to strengthen the school community, to unite it as a cohesive group with shared loyalties, purpose and vision. A brief school history was produced, which captured the spirit of the school in revealing its sense of its past and how girls had experienced being students there.

Gabrielle Blood also organised the restoration of the Murray Griffin mural in the school foyer, the mounting of the clock tower bell, a new school and new house banners, and a ceramic mural, also located in the foyer near the former principals’ portraits and the school honour boards. Tradition played a significant part in taking Mac.Rob into the twenty-first century, and its principal reinforced its importance by introducing a new one, the awarding of school colours. A new school uniform was phased in and there was an increased focus on sport and an expansion of co-curricula, as well as leadership opportunities for students. A student welfare co-ordinator was employed and there was a renewal of focus on student achievement and learning technologies.

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128 This mural links the school with its Greek traditions.
A woman for all seasons

In addition to her duties as principal, Gabrielle Blood was also a member of the Victorian Institute of Secondary Education (VISE), later known as the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Board (VCAB), where her work was influential in the development of the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), and in accelerating its implementation at Mac.Rob. Moreover, according to assistant principal and long-serving teacher, Margaret Akins, she helped to establish links between Mac.Rob and Melbourne and Monash universities, which provided opportunities for the school to have a voice in the development of policy that affected its students. This was an important innovation in the developing relationships between secondary schools, universities and employment markets.

Gabrielle Blood retired in 1996, but her continued support for the school has been important, particularly from the perspective of her successor, Lesley Boston. Blood is now an organic part of Mac.Rob’s traditions as her headship is acknowledged annually in the awarding of a scholarship for academic excellence and school spirit. She continues to attend school functions regularly, supportively and very quietly. Susan Sherson, then president of the Palladians Association, farewelled the retiring principal affectionately in 1996: ‘We…wish you now the time to pursue those interests and loves which have taken second place to Mac.Rob: not least, your continuing work with the University of Melbourne council, your golf and your Latin. (See girls, she truly is the Woman for all Seasons!).’

The timing of Blood’s retirement was important, for she recognised that particular talents and skills were required to steer Mac.Rob into the next major phase of its ongoing development: the refurbishment of the Kings Way building, built in 1934, and the new building project planned for the lake side of the property. It was time to handover the reigns of leadership to a person with the experience, energy and expertise required to take Mac.Rob into the twenty-first century, physically and academically. That person was Lesley Boston.

129 S. Sherson, Pallas, 1996.
Lesley Boston
1996-2004

Some of the key words for education in the 1990s—efficiency, effectiveness, international competitiveness, education for work, retention, retraining, key competencies, national curriculum, national profiles, restructuring, devolution, actions plans, mission statements, frameworks, performance indicators, program budgets, education markets and education experts—[give] a pretty clear sense of the overall shape that education is currently taking.130

Lesley Boston’s time will be remembered for the outstanding academic results of our students, the emphasis on developing leadership skills, the new buildings, doubling the size of the school and the international recognition of gifted and talented student education gained by her contribution both locally and overseas.

Suzanne Russell (Westcott)131

In discussing her contribution to the school Lesley Boston declined to talk about her early teaching career and personal biography, preferring to focus on the major challenges of her role as principal of Mac Rob, and on the way in which the school developed under her leadership. These themes are important to an understanding of how Mac.Rob and its place in the Victorian educational landscape changed under her leadership, and in turn how these changes affected the students’ experience of the school.

In 1996 the Mac.Rob school council met once more to determine the criteria upon which the next school principal would be selected. Two priorities were clear, according to school council member Suzanne Russell (Wescott). The first was that the new principal would have to steer the school through substantial building refurbishments and construction, which would virtually double its size.132 Such expansion would be a mammoth challenge because of the limited space on the small plot of crown land on which the school had been built. In addition, the original 1934 edifice was listed with Heritage Victoria (a protectionist measure on Mac.Rob’s part) as nationally and internationally significant, which meant that any alterations would be subject to a complicated process of approval. Expansion was further limited by local and state government approval for construction of the Albert Park

132 Interview with Suzanne Russell (Westcott), 20 April 2004.
Golf Course and the Grand Prix circuit. This confined the school to an impractically shaped space that already abutted one of Melbourne’s busiest arterial roads, Kings Way. The extensive nature of the building project would also demand a considerable financial talent and contribution from the school to supplement the available government funding. The new principal would thus require the expertise to raise a substantial amount of money, to initiate and manage the entire project and then see it through to completion.\(^{133}\)

The second priority concerned the academic reputation of the school, a priority laid out clearly in the school council’s report of the charter achievements for the 1997–1999 charter period.\(^{134}\) On the advice of outgoing principal Gabrielle Blood, the school council stipulated that the new principal’s major goal should be to make Mac.Rob the state’s most successful academic secondary school at the VCE examinations. Between 1994 and 1996 the proportion of students receiving TER scores in the top fifth of results had increased from 62.2 per cent to 70.6 per cent.\(^{135}\) As the successful candidate for principal, Lesley Boston was selected to take this achievement still further, to maximise the potential of each student, and see the school through its most significant period of expansion.\(^{136}\)

Lesley Boston had followed the traditional path of her two more recent predecessors (Carr and Bowles), coming to Mac.Rob via Mentone Girls’ Secondary College, where she had successfully steered that school through a similar expansion project while also achieving a reputation for the school as an excellent provider of girls’ education. As she explains, it was her task to lift the public image of Mac.Rob through achieving academic excellence. She was also charged with the formidable business of linking the building program with this goal through the provision of improved facilities, which would allow for a more comprehensive curriculum.

\(^{133}\) Interview with Suzanne Russell (Westcott), 13 April 2004.
\(^{135}\) Pallas, 1990–1996 and Vista show VCE results and compare them with statewide outcomes.
Capital works

The process of expansion proved to be difficult because of the complexities of securing land. According to Lesley Boston, there was a suggestion that the school move, with four hundred students to be placed at Prahran Technical School and the remainder at South Melbourne Technical College. This was an abhorrent option for the Mac.Rob community given its history of being shunted around from site to site. The school, Boston explains, was eventually offered a tiny patch of extra land that allowed no space for playing fields, and a suitable building had to be designed to fit into the awkward space allotted.

Once land had been excised, Boston set about organising the development project. She established a building appeal committee in 1996, with Suzanne Russell (Westcott) as convenor. At the same time, she set up a development office (something that is more common to private schools rather than state high schools) to coordinate the fundraising efforts and act as a public relations body whilst promoting the school and seeking sponsorship for individual school programs. It fell to Mac.Rob to raise $2 million of the total project budget of $11 million, a challenge for a school never before faced with such a massive commitment. A united and cohesive school community would be essential for success, particularly when building work began and school programs were disrupted by its effects.

How does a state high school go about raising such a vast amount of money? Donations? Bequests? Hopes of tapping into the largesse of former students were tempered by the reality that women did not have the disposable income of many men, Boston spelled out in her interview. Thus, any assumption that Mac.Rob ‘old girls’ could support the school financially in the way that MHS ‘old boys’ did was mistaken. There were some bequests, however, she recalled, including one from Nina Carr and another one from a former student who bequeathed her house to the school, thus forcing her husband to vacate following her death. Fundraising efforts included $300 donations for each seat in the school theatre, with individual plaques memorialising the gifts. A donation of $15,000 was made to restore the school entry area, an allocation, according to Boston, that drew criticism from some of the teaching staff who thought that money should not be wasted on such refurbishment. This was not the view of many former students who were being asked for their financial support;

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137 Interview with Lesley Boston, 6 September 2004.
138 Interview with Lesley Boston, 6 September 2004.
139 Interview with Lesley Boston, 6 September 2004.
they had always regarded the entry area as gloomy, antiseptic and unappealing. A building cooperative made up of members of the school community was also established, allowing the school to borrow $200,000 to finance the building program, which had fallen short in school-raised funds by $400,000. The school council borrowed the remaining $200,000. At the same time, the students organised fund-raising activities, some of which involved the whole school, thus bringing everyone together in a spirit of common endeavour.

Expanding the horizons

It also fell to Lesley Boston to deal with the effects of the development projects, including the landscaping of the school grounds when the building works were done. As one former student recalled at a 2004 school reunion, in language reminiscent of the first day at the Melbourne Continuation School in 1905, ‘It was terrible at times, with the constant banging of hammers and nail guns, the screeching of electric saws and the dust which seemed to be everywhere.’ According to Lesley Boston, there were a couple of letters from parents concerned about the amount of dust their daughters ‘were eating’. Poor buildings, she argues, affect enrolments and, with this in mind, she encouraged the school community to remember that the disruptions would pass. ‘It was not an easy time for anyone.’ By the end of 1999 the first stage of the building program, the Lakeside Project, was complete. Lesley Boston was able to inform the school community that, within twelve months, students and teachers would no longer have to cross Kings Way to attend classes in the Galaxy building – part of which the Education Department had been renting for Mac.Rob – for the refurbishment of the original 1934 building would by then be complete. At the same time the principal reminded the school community that the Education Department’s commitment of over $7 million to the project demonstrated its acknowledgement of the ‘value of the distinctive education offered to girls at Mac.Rob’, in effect securing the school’s future. It was a timely reminder.

141 Interview with Lesley Boston, 2 November 2004. Also L. Boston, Principal’s Report, Pallas, 1999. Pallas, School newsletters and Vista document the experiences of the extensions and refurbishment from beginning to end. There are also extensive photographic records of the process. See MGHS Archive.
143 Interview with Lesley Boston, 2 November 2004.
144 L. Boston, Pallas, 1999.
145 Interview with Lesley Boston, 2 November 2004.
As part of the effort to meet its goal of ‘unequalled academic excellence’ with girls’ reaching their full potential, as set out in the school charter, Lesley Boston welcomed a comprehensive student, parent and teacher survey launched by the Education Department in 1997. The results revealed what the girls were thinking about regarding all aspects of their school, including teaching. According to Lesley Boston, she and the administrative team sought to focus on teacher strengths, ‘taking the attitude that they could always do things better’. She puts the survey in context:

As a result of the survey, the staff had to choose three things that could be focused on. From the girls’ perspectives, it would be celebrating girls’ achievements and personal goals. So, the girls were the main focus – their achievements and goals. They were encouraged to enter competitions to test their skills and the outcomes were shared at assemblies.

An important advantage of doing this, according to Boston, was that it recognised the diversity of individual ability among the students, giving girls who were not ‘A+’ students the opportunity to work in teams, with achievement coming through shared enterprise. The girls could ‘learn from each other and gain useful experience through cooperative endeavour’; invaluable training in leadership. What the former principal was pointing out perhaps is that not all girls who come to Mac.Rob have ‘immediate brilliance’. Some girls, in her experience, ‘grow into academic achievement by being exposed to different learning approaches that are more suited to their own learning styles’.

Music was also prioritised again in Mac.Rob’s journey towards general excellence, although Boston encouraged the students to participate in a wide range of school and interschool activities instead of focusing on just one interest or strength. With a tradition of achievement in music, Mac.Rob confirmed its importance in the curriculum in the Boston era by devoting the entire ground floor of the new Lakeside Building to it, emphasising performance in particular. Lesley Boston regarded this as an important part of the girls’ education, not only to provide experience and enjoyment, but also to teach them

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146 The survey and the results are available in the MGHS Archive.
147 Interview with Lesley Boston, 2 November 2004.
148 Interview with Lesley Boston, 2 November 2004. The results also revealed what the teaching staff also thought about all aspects of school life. See Appendices 1, 2 and 3 of ‘School Self Assessment, Report of Charter Achievements 1997–1999’, MGHS Archive.
149 Interview with Lesley Boston, 2 November 2004.
150 Interview with Lesley Boston, 2 November 2004.
the value of performance itself in life. Valuing performance in life meant ‘becoming supportive of each other’s endeavours and talent, as well as developing an appreciation for the arts in all their diverse forms’.  

While music was emphasised, sport, she observes, was not given the attention Boston felt it deserved during her years at Mac.Rob. With the school’s difficult geographical location, she adds, no provision was possible for good sporting facilities and a program that might draw in girls keen to excel in that area. Historically, Mac.Rob girls have tended not to excel at sport in great numbers, although there have been some exceptional sporting achievers. Interviews with former students suggest that bookish girls often dislike sports, where a girl’s athletic ability, or lack thereof, is open to public scrutiny. Judith Smart, a student from the mid-1960s, agrees, but notes that the school made provision for girls to engage in less traditional sports – tenpin bowls and golf, for example – where they were less visible and not forced into competition. Lesley Boston’s desire to see sport become more prominent in the curriculum given the provision of appropriate facilities suggests, in part perhaps, a need to challenge the historically created archetype of the female academic achiever as bookish (intellectual) rather than both athletic and intellectual. This would broaden Mac.Rob’s market appeal to girls who excel both academically and at sport. Clearly, Boston was focused on providing and expanding opportunities for broader student participation. As she wrote in Vista 1998, ‘One of our tasks as educators is to assist our students to recognise, seize and make the most of opportunities.’

As was the case with her predecessors, Lesley Boston belonged to several educational organisations, often an effective way of having some influence on education policy. She also travelled internationally in her position as principal of an academically elite state high school for girls. She was a member of the Monash University council and chair of a working group of the Committee of Convocation of the University of Melbourne. In 2003 she was a member of the state-wide curriculum reform round-table that was part of the consultative process in the lead-up to the Blueprint for Government Schools, which listed seven strategies aimed at improving the quality of the government school system. She also joined the Alliance of Girls’ Schools of Australia, the first principal at Mac.Rob to do so, and was elected vice president in 2003. According to Boston, joining the Alliance was a

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152 Interview with Lesley Boston, 6 September 2004.
153 Interview with Lesley Boston, 2 November 2004.
154 Conversation with Judith Smart at RMIT University, recorded in P. Parker’s journal 2005.
significant move as, through it, she could promote the school and support Mac.Rob girls in better understanding the pathways that were open to them as they continued on to university.\textsuperscript{156} Boston also continued Mac.Rob’s relationship with Godstowe School, a private preparatory school in Buckinghamshire, England, where four girls per year could work as assistants to the matrons of the school’s four boarding houses, upon completion of the VCE. Mac.Rob’s archives contain many affectionate and happy letters to Boston from former students who spent time at Godstowe and were eager to keep in touch with their former principal whilst sharing, too, the value of their Mac.Rob experiences. As one student wrote in 1998, ‘You have to go abroad to understand your own country.’\textsuperscript{157}

Overseas travel was something the principal encouraged, as did her predecessors. Lesley Boston believed that it helped girls to mature, broadening their perspectives on life and their understanding of different cultures. International travel became an important aspect of the school’s overall effort to improve students’ personal and scholastic achievement. Choral groups, for example, have toured internationally, receiving accolades for their performances. \textit{Vista, Pallas} and school newsletters report on these regularly. Traditionally, Lesley Boston, explains, Mac.Rob has ‘optimised performance as an indicator of success’ and as a way of ‘modelling what is possible’ to motivate girls.\textsuperscript{158} As principal, Boston adds, she tried hard to refocus what, in her opinion, had developed into a single-minded pursuit of examination results, emphasising instead a collaborative process of teaching and learning. In her distinctive approach to this task, she sought to ‘generate a culture of performance in which girls could share the knowledge and skills they had mastered through work and practice’.\textsuperscript{159} Overseas experiences were important in generating such a culture and included art, music and history tours, exchange student programs, international conferences, and a cross-cultural exchange project that linked Mac.Rob girls with students in countries including Germany, France, Indonesia and South Africa. There were significant residual effects of some travel experiences, according to the former principal, as fundraising projects often came from these links, with Mac.Rob students seeking to provide resources for students in a third-world country. As she wrote in her reports in the various school magazines, there was a myriad of activities and opportunities available to the Mac.Rob girl to broaden her experience of life, to Boston, always a vital component of an education for leadership within one’s community.

\textsuperscript{156} Interview with Lesley Boston, 6 September 2004.
\textsuperscript{158} Interview with Lesley Boston, 6 September 2004.
\textsuperscript{159} Interview with Lesley Boston, 6 September 2004.
End of an era?

In 2002, Lesley Boston’s contract was extended for a further five years. That year saw each of Mac.Rob’s 225 VCE students receive a tertiary placement. Compared to their predecessors, the girls’ preferences were remarkably wide. Only two chose teaching and one nursing, the majority studying law, arts, science, commerce, and health sciences, including medicine, pharmacy and physiotherapy. Lesley Boston, however, retired from the Education Department at the end of the first term of 2004. With the completion of the projects for which she had been initially employed, a group within the school began to feel that a new emphasis in school leadership was needed. Perhaps she had done herself out of a job as the massive tasks that had originally motivated her selection as principal were complete. Some staff members divulge that they were exhausted after constantly having to energise to cope with the years of renovations and extensions, with changes in the curriculum and professional and personal expectations of teachers. Relationships with some of the staff had grown strained, a few of them openly agitating for leadership change. Boston’s announcement of her retirement staved off further restlessness and disunity. In her final message to the Mac.Rob community in Vista, Lesley Boston acknowledged the achievements of the school and its community during her principalship, at the same time recognising the pressures this had placed on the teaching and administrative staff: ‘Stresses of the increased workload for teachers and administrators, the exponential increase in knowledge and the increasingly high expectations by society of all those who work in schools, make heavy demands on staff. Mac.Rob staff cope extremely well.’

Lesley Boston’s tenure saw Mac.Rob recognised as the top secondary school in Victoria at the VCE examinations, an achievement envisaged by the school council at her appointment in 1996. Every VCE student was offered her first choice of university place. As is often the case with school leadership and management, not all teachers agreed with the principal’s vision for Mac.Rob. But, while some found it difficult to play their role in achieving the school’s ambitious academic goals, others enjoyed the challenge. Boston’s parting message in Vista 2004 eloquently restates her personal educational philosophy and satisfaction with Mac.Rob’s position within the Victorian educational landscape:

The best schools are vibrant, dynamic places which look to the future, respond to societal changes through the appropriateness of their curriculum, incorporate new knowledge about teaching and learning, yet respect the school’s traditions, hold fast to our core values, as expressed in our charter, and are mindful of the past and learn from it. Our VCE results are unsurpassed, and the respect accorded the school in education circles and the community generally, is testament to the fact that...Mac.Rob is at the forefront of education in Australia.\(^{162}\)

\(^{162}\) Lesley Boston, *Vista*, Vol. 8, No. 1, Winter, 2004, p. 2. The unveiling of Lesley Boston’s portrait in the year following her retirement provoked some controversy, for it challenged traditional ways of depicting women who had led Mac.Rob. For many the portrait was initially shocking in its difference from the others. A lasting, perhaps confronting word from Boston, yet dignified and confident, not always predictable—in keeping with the values she espoused.
At the beginning of the second term in 2004, Jane Garvey assumed the principalship of Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School. This was the first time a Mac.Rob principal had combined a professional career with motherhood and family. Whereas her more recent predecessors had come to Mac.Rob from Mentone Girls’ Secondary College, Jane Garvey came from Blackburn High School where she had successfully held the position of assistant principal. Trained as a teacher of History and English, she began her teaching career at Bacchus Marsh High School, and later taught at Wellington High School and Canterbury Girls’ Secondary College. Jane Garvey is the first principal of Mac.Rob to have been awarded a doctorate. Her areas of research, the careers of women in the teaching service and self-management in Victoria’s state schools as a study on school reform, provide her with important experience and knowledge as she heads the school further into the twenty-first century. An important part of Garvey’s early mission as Mac.Rob principal, according to Suzanne Russell (Wescott), was to concentrate on fostering staff unity and leading the school into its next charter period, which concludes in 2006. The story of her principalship will no doubt be told in a subsequent school history.
Chapter Seven

Being a Girl, Being a Mac.Rob girl

A Melbourne High School girl ought to be nearly perfect. I always try to sit properly.

Bonny Brandt 1928

Mac.Rob gave me three years of relative anonymity...I threw myself into being a student.

Shirley B. Paine, Tiger Lilies

A lot of people were impressed that I had attended Mac.Rob.

Stella Limberis 2004

In 2003, Voula Karvelas, former editor of Palladians’ magazine Athene, e-mailed me, as the writer of this school history, twenty questions to provide her readers with an insight into the progress of the research for the school history. Voula asked, ‘Do you think Mac.Rob women are really different from any other women who attend state high schools?’ A complex question that suggests, perhaps, that there are unresolved contradictions in how Mac.Rob girls perceive and understand themselves and how they are perceived and understood. Recognising this complexity provides a useful structure for investigating what it has meant to be a Mac.Rob girl historically.

A Mac.Rob girl. Does this simply signify a girl from Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School or is it an example of a national penchant to abbreviate lengthy titles for ease of definition and lessening of pretension? Certainly one principal, Rubina Gainfort, believed it undermined the dignity of the school and its students. In 1954 she tried to have the school revert to its previous title of Melbourne Girls’ High School. Gainfort wrote to the Chief Inspector of secondary schools, Alexander McDonell, arguing that the school’s previous name could not be manipulated in the ‘frivolous, demeaning manner’ allowed by its present title. McDonell

1 Bonny Brandt, Pallas, December 1928, p. 34. Brandt was writing for the school magazine while holidaying in Hawaii.
3 Stella Limberis, E-mail survey, September 2004.
4 This does not refer only to the post-1934 period, when the school took on this name, but also to the heritage of values from the Continuation School, MHS and MGHS years.
decided not to invite controversy and ignored Gainfort’s plea.\textsuperscript{5} Through the intervening years, ‘Mac.Rob’ has stuck and it is used widely within the school community. More recently, students have tended to refer to themselves as Mac.Robians, a comfortable word used to denote the student body as a whole—an affectionate and powerful form of identification. A Mac.Rob girl: a Mac.Robian. There is something definitive about these expressions former and current students use to refer to themselves, as if a Mac.Rob girl is a kind of cultural artefact, a living tradition evident in how girls imagine themselves in relation to their schooling experiences. Does this type of girl really exist? Is she imbued with certain qualities and abilities that define her as a Mac.Rob girl, a yardstick against which all Mac.Rob girls can measure themselves, or be measured? Has such an ideal girl been created in Mac.Rob’s traditions, its ethos and organisational structures as a selective, single-sex, state-wide secondary education provider?

Historically, Mac.Rob girls have defined themselves in different ways, often in relation to idealised images of being a girl. A girl might describe herself, for example, as a swot, in contrast to others who are interested in boys and enjoy vibrant social lives. Or she might describe herself as a rebel in contrast to a more conformist, conservative girl, or a sporty girl in contrast to a nerdy swot. She might describe herself as a country girl, a less sophisticated girl, who experienced a degree of cultural shock after moving to Melbourne to complete her education at Mac.Rob. She might describe herself as a working-class girl who felt that she stood out like a sore thumb because of her speech, the size and shape of her sandwiches, the shine on the seat of her tunic, the mends in her stockings or her need to completely separate her public, school life from her private, home life. She might describe herself as academically mediocre, never excelling or making her mark in the way she perceived that others around her did at school and beyond. She might describe herself as a high achiever motivated to succeed and determined to attain that top mark at the university examinations. She might depict herself as a girl whose life was turned around because she came to this school and not another. She might also describe herself as a pragmatist, regarding school as a necessary stage in her life, a period that simply prepared her for the future as she expected of her schooling experiences. A Mac.Rob girl is thus a multiplicity of ideas, images and experiences; she has no single explanation or story. But still she persists.

\textsuperscript{5} Rubina Gainfort, letter to A. McDonell, Chief Inspector of Secondary Schools in Victoria, 21 April, 1954, MGHS Archive, Unit 12. McDonell was appointed Director of Education in 1960.
Unravelling the threads

The previous chapters of this history have introduced some of the social expectations that influenced the girls of the Continuation School, MHS, MGHS and Mac.Rob. As we saw, school rules and traditions, ethos and culture, even the way in which the school was organised, spelled out very clearly the kind of girls Mac.Rob students were expected to be. Most girls submitted to those expectations happily, pragmatically or ambivalently. For all that, girls did challenge school authority and prevailing beliefs about women’s roles. Some challenged it openly, some aggressively. Some were more circumspect and still others tested authority with discretion and diplomacy.

Given the multiplicity of certainties and uncertainties about the meaning of being ‘a Mac.Rob girl’, this chapter attempts to work through the varying identities as they are revealed in the stories of girls’ experiences of being at Mac.Rob during the best part of a hundred years: to make sense of the Mac.Rob girl in order to make sense of Mac.Rob itself. With this in mind, this chapter is divided into three periods: 1905–27, 1928–65 and 1966–2005, within which several themes are posited that try to make sense of the experience of being a girl at this school at a particular time. These themes, including the contradictions of being a Mac.Rob girl, coping with the rules, realities and constraints of being a student at the school, and the emotional attachments and successes or failures experienced, demonstrate the ways Mac.Rob girls have managed and made sense of their schooling years.

Being a Melbourne Continuation School girl
and Melbourne High School girl
1905–27

*The intellectual equality of women still had to be established in the popular imagination and this could not be done unless girls competed on equal terms with boys in public examinations.*

In 1905, fifteen-year-old Rubina Gainfort was one of the 135 girls who began at the MCS in Spring Street. She had relinquished a scholarship to move to the Continuation School, a change that launched her on a journey towards independence and autonomy. An unhappy relationship with her mother motivated her to become a teacher, as it afforded respectability and independence, and an opportunity to leave home and carve out her own career. Her

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three years at the Continuation School were not without problems, for, as she recalled much
later in life, ‘It was the first year of high school and they were not quite sure of the course. I
suppose we had no-one to set us an example of what life could be like’. As a ground-
breaking female post-elementary student, she was, nonetheless, sure about what she wanted
to be and what she wanted to do with her life. She had excelled at mathematics during her
elementary schooling and wanted to continue to study mathematics at university level. At
the Continuation School, Rubina was confronted with a gendered curriculum. It denied girls
the opportunity to study geometry and trigonometry because of the perceived danger those
‘mentally exacting’ subjects might exert on their overall physical and mental well-being. As
she recalled it:

I remember one of the teachers, a man, was trying to make up the subjects we
should do for our Senior Public. And there were three of us who wanted to do
maths. And he indicated that mathematics was not to be done by girls. Only
the boys were to do mathematics. And he allowed us to do algebra and
geometry but he would not allow us to do trigonometry. So three of us, the
three girls—we had a coach. We went to that coach after our Senior Public
year, during the Christmas holidays, and he coached us in trigonometry. We
sat for the supplementary examination and we got our trigonometry. So there,
we had our three maths as a background for our university course.  

Rubina resisted the restrictions imposed upon her as a female, but she did so discreetly.
Ultimately, her success was the school’s success, with Rubina Gainfort a model of what a
highly motivated girl with initiative could achieve within an authoritarian and inflexible
school culture. One of her classmates, Alberta Watson, also found a solution to the
inequities of the gendered curriculum. Alberta, a mature sixteen-year-old when she
enrolled in 1905, soon became frustrated at the clash between the academic and ‘female’
curriculum. The problem was that cookery lessons were timetabled to run parallel to other
subjects, forcing girls to miss the more important lessons, the real lessons. The story goes
that, aided and abetted by science teacher Julia Flynn (future Chief Inspector of Secondary
Schools), girls would hide pots and pans under their long aprons, take them along to their
science class and return later to wash them up. This is a quite remarkable feat given that
the Director of Education, Frank Tate, and Joseph Hocking, the school principal, are said

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7 Interview between Rubina Gainfort and John Williams, 1984.
8 Interview with Rubina Gainfort, 1984.
9 Interview with Alberta Watson, 8 November 1982.
to have regularly taken their lunches from girls’ cooking sessions. Furthermore, Hocking used to take advantage of the cookery sessions by having girls cater for guests at gatherings held at the Continuation School, no doubt a great advertisement for what the girls could do. Nevertheless, as Alberta Watson saw it, cookery was not going to get her to the university.\(^\text{10}\)

Rubina Gainfort’s story has already been told in this thesis,\(^\text{11}\) but Alberta Watson enjoyed an equally successful career. With a Masters degree behind her she, too, taught in country schools north and west of Melbourne, travelled overseas and was appointed Inspector of Secondary Schools in 1942, a position she held until her retirement in 1950. Both women saw contradictions in being girls at Victoria’s first state high school, Rubina particularly resenting Joseph Hocking’s autocratic leadership style,\(^\text{12}\) but they managed to negotiate the patriarchal structure and culture of the Continuation School to achieve their goals.

Not all girls could follow Rubina Gainfort’s path, however. Where she had the advantage of ongoing financial and moral support from her mother and younger sister Winifred, other young women such as Alice Brackenshire from Ballarat had to find a different way to achieve a university degree. After leaving the MCS, Alice entered the teacher training college on a two-year government scholarship and went out teaching after two years before returning, as financial circumstances allowed, to complete her university degree. She was typical of girls without the luxury of continuing as full-time students while they completed their senior public year and university degrees; Alice Brackenshire’s basic need to support herself came first.\(^\text{13}\)

Ellen Balaam’s story offers a stark contrast to the experiences of the majority of the Continuation School/MHS girls. Her career path in medicine\(^\text{14}\) was followed by very few girls in the early decades of the twentieth century, girls from state schools in particular. Ellen enrolled at the Continuation School in 1906. So successfully did she complete the senior public course, she was awarded a government exhibition and a University College exhibition, graduating with a degree in medicine in 1915, one of only six Continuation...

\(^{10}\) Interview with Alberta Watson, 8 November 1982.
\(^{12}\) See chapter two, Joseph Hocking.
\(^{13}\) VPRS 10249, Unit 69.
\(^{14}\) Women were admitted to the study of medicine at the University of Melbourne in 1887.
School graduates to gain a university degree that year.\textsuperscript{15} Ellen practised at the Queen Victoria Hospital and, in 1922, in recognition of her work, received the honour of performing the exhibition operation at the first International Congress of the Medical Women’s International Association, held in the United States.\textsuperscript{16} Ellen Balaam married George Murray and successfully combined marriage and career, undertaking extensive public work in addition to her duties as wife and doctor. This was quite common for women of her class and professional status; civic duty and responsibility for the less fortunate were long-accepted roles for the well-to-do. Balaam was also exceptionally loyal to her old school, in ways reminiscent of ‘old boys’ who look out for their schools long after they have made their way in the world. She was a key player in MGHS’s struggle to survive following the splintering of the school in 1927, and was at the forefront of efforts to secure a new and permanent home for the girls.\textsuperscript{17}

Ellen Balaam has been spoken about in reverential tones by many who knew her. Her memory and example endure in school traditions through an annual school prize and the maintenance of the honour board for head prefects, donated by her at considerable expense in 1965. A success in her private and professional life, Balaam has been thought of as an archetypal Mac.Rob girl by some former students and teachers. For others who saw her at school assemblies over the years, she was a greatly revered figure from the school’s early past to whom they were unable to relate. Ellen Balaam was not typical of her peers at the Continuation School. Even with a scholarship, considerable financial and moral support was required to successfully complete a medical degree. Of course, a young girl would have to aspire to be a doctor in the first place and such an aspiration was rare even among the few with the capacity to undertake such a lengthy and costly course.\textsuperscript{18} Monopolised by

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{15} MCS Examination Book 1905, MGHS Archive.  
\textsuperscript{17} PN, May 1985, p. 4. Balaam (who always used her maiden name) continued to be active on social issues throughout her life. See Frances Ferrier, ‘Down Memory Lane in the Early Days of Motoring’, RACV Magazine, September 1976, p. 5.  
\textsuperscript{18} Farley Kelly and Marjorie Theobald have written extensively on women at the University of Melbourne, their work depicting what Ellen Balaam’s university experience would have been like. See Farley Kelly, 1985, Degrees of Liberation: A Short History of Women in the University of Melbourne, The Women Graduates Centenary Committee of the University of Melbourne, and Marjorie Theobald, 1996, Knowing Women: Origins of Women’s Education in Nineteenth-century Australia, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. for example.}
male private school students, medicine simply did not enter into the mental world of most girls, whether from government or private schools.\(^19\)

The experience of another young girl who came to the Continuation School two years after Ellen left for university, suggests that not every girl came to the school with the same values, upbringing, knowledge, motivation, and confidence. Where Ellen Balaam came from a well-to-do Melbourne family, Dora Hogan (Stillard) was a nervous, unconfident country girl who traded the safety and security of a country home and town for the unfamiliarity of Melbourne, and hostel living, to study at Victoria’s first state high school. Dora had never been away from her home in Bright before moving to Melbourne in 1910. What saved her from succumbing to the pressures of her new life was, she believed, meeting up with Julia Flynn (future Chief Inspector of Secondary Schools) who, as infant mistress, had taught Dora sewing at Bright State School a decade before. As Dora remembered it, when her teacher politely inquired after Dora’s parents, the homesick girl broke down in tears. Flynn subsequently took a special interest in Dora, a commitment that might well have made the difference in this young country girl’s completing her schooling.\(^20\)

There were times when Dora Stillard found it difficult to deal with being both exceptionally bright and highly esteemed for her personal qualities. In 1911, as the top student, she was awarded the annual Rix Prize. Her surprise at hearing that she was to receive the prestigious award was only exceeded by the news that she had also been appointed head prefect. But the apprehensive Dora could not understand why she had been selected for these honours above other girls, imagining that she must have been made head prefect only because she had won the Rix Prize. She was downcast, having convinced herself that she had failed to earn the honour given her. This was no false modesty, and when Julia Flynn confirmed that the vote for the prestigious annual school prize had indeed been unanimous, Dora let go some of her self-doubt. Both her academic success and her exemplary character made her an ideal role model for the Continuation School students.\(^21\)

\(^{19}\) See Appendix 3.
\(^{20}\) Interview with Dora Hogan (Stillard), 11 October 1982.
\(^{21}\) Interview with Dora Hogan (Stillard), 11 October 1982. The idea of merit was an important one in the early decades of the twentieth century. Working-class parents in particular were concerned that their daughters and sons were awarded scholarships based solely on merit at a competitive examination. They did not seek charity or any other ambiguously and subjectively defined basis for awards their children might be considered for. See also Pauline Parker, ‘State Scholarship System or Poverty Competition? An Analysis of Some Junior Government Scholarships Awarded in Victoria
Dora later returned to her old school as a teacher (Dora Hogan). Judith Smart, a student in 1964, remembers her well as a gentle, intelligent woman with a wicked sense of humour. Dora retired in 1965 when she was seventy years old, but her story does not end with her retirement. She returned to the school later that same year for the official presentation of the school prefects’ honour board donated by Dr Ellen Balaam. The unpretentious Dora Hogan (Stillard), whose name was on the honour board, was stunned by the school’s unexpected acknowledgment and celebration of her contribution when it was explained during the presentation that Mrs Dora Hogan, former Mac.Rob teacher, was the ‘very Dora Stillard listed on the honour board as the second head prefect’.

So they stood and clapped and cheered. I felt like Bob Menzies. I got redder and redder and then I stood and smiled and just whispered “thank you”. Then they started again. They couldn’t believe it. Even the teachers said, “We had no idea that you were ever here”. So I had all that lovely applause again which I had had in March when I left the school because, you see, I was seventy.

Where Rubina Gainfort, Alberta Watson and Ellen Balaam radiated confidence and knew what they wanted to be, there were some girls who felt that they were in the wrong place. Muriel Cant, a MHS pupil in 1925, felt like a misfit, ‘keenly different from the people who had lived in Melbourne all their lives’. This clash between the rural and urban social worlds was not uncommon, as Dora Hogan’s story showed. Muriel, the daughter of a grain and corn merchant, had spent most of her fifteen years in Colac in Victoria’s Western District. Her parents moved to Melbourne just before she went to high school and she lacked the security and comfort of friends from a local primary or central school as she made the transition to the Continuation School. Muriel’s main problem was making sense of the urban way of life, so far removed from the rural world of her childhood. She felt like an outsider and this made her feel inferior. It was not as if anyone specifically caused this, Muriel mused, but she felt personally disadvantaged because she was a country girl.

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22 Judith Smart to P. Parker, 20 November 2006.
23 Dora was fortunate as she was given special permission to teach at Mac.Rob in the face of the regulation that forced women to resign upon marriage. Dora taught English, Latin and Mathematics at Mac.Rob 1951–1965.
24 Interview with Dora Hogan (Stillard), 11 October 1982.
Going to school in the city meant new things to cope with, and the language used by her schoolmates sometimes confounded her. Muriel’s friend, Avis, for example, once referred to the Village Belle in conversation, but Muriel thought she was talking about ‘a bell that rang’. Things that were second nature to most of the girls were ‘absolutely foreign’ to Muriel. Life changed dramatically with the move to the city. Her mother, a staunch Scottish Protestant, was wary of ‘wicked Melbourne’ where a young woman had to be far more careful than in the country. ‘Getting around had to be thought about too’, Muriel added, ‘as it meant travelling on public transport; a young girl’s security and reputation had to be protected in public spaces’. Muriel’s mother felt the burden of responsibility for a vulnerable young school girl in a busy, growing metropolis, and some of her fears were imbibed by her daughter. Muriel completed only one year of high school, leaving to attend Stott’s Business College in preparation for office work. Most of the other girls did the same, she explained, with only a small percentage even thinking about continuing on to higher levels: ‘Most girls left school after Intermediate and got a job.’ Having attended MHS was in itself a ticket to employment, and, according to Muriel, the best reason for getting an education there. Muriel’s experience was a common one. As many former students explained, the majority of parents did not seek academic success for their daughters; they wanted their daughters to find good jobs. Rita Smith’s experience confirms this. Rita left MGHS in 1930 after earning her Intermediate Certificate, and spent the next twelve years as a clerical worker. She married at the age of 26 and, with her years of experience in the workforce and the commercial training she had received at school, was able to keep the books for her husband’s business whilst raising her son and daughter.

Muriel Cant was not the only girl who found the transition from country to city life challenging, but where Muriel felt like a misfit at school, Winifred Lade (Tinkler) loved her high school experience. When she was accepted into MGHS in 1929, Winifred, together with her mother and brother, moved from the coal-mining town of Yallourn to live with Winifred’s grandmother in North Fitzroy. They left behind Winifred’s father who was working in Yallourn. The family then moved to Caulfield, occupying rooms in a friend’s house, and later to Hughesdale where they rented a house of their own. Winifred recalls the challenges of suburban and city travel—cable cars, electric trains, daily and monthly tickets

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26 The Village Belle, a hotel in St. Kilda, still exists.
27 Interview with Muriel Cant, 17 July 2001.
29 A number of Mac.Rob women tell similar stories of separation from fathers during the Great Depression in Victoria. See also David Potts, 2006, The Myth of the Great Depression, Scribe, Melbourne for similar stories.
and getting to and from Flinders Street Station to Spring Street and Government House, when the school moved there in 1930. Adjusting to city life was not easy, particularly with the family unit split. Winifred loved her four years at MGHS and after returning home to Yallourn she worked for a while in a shop and later ‘took up teaching’.  

Appearances were always important at Victoria’s first state high school, with unrelenting pressure on female students to behave with utmost decorum: girls would be judged as either ‘fit’ or ‘unfit’ depending on their appearance as well as their behaviour. How they acted as girls was thought to indicate how they would turn out as young women, and girls needed to get the message that some things were admired and valued in a girl but some were not. A report from headmistress Margery Robertson to the Continuation School principal Joseph Hocking in 1916 provides a good example of a girl who failed miserably to meet the standards expected of the female students. This unfortunate young woman was described by the headmistress as ‘one of the most objectionable girls I have ever seen’. Her failure lay in her incorrect dress, and she compounded that failure by being often ‘far from tidy’. As a result, she was regarded as an object of distaste, with teachers ‘ashamed to meet her in the street’. The real issue, most likely, was the fact that the girl’s appearance would attract undesirable interest and attention, from tram conductors for example. Her appearance might send the wrong message to men, and such an ignorant girl could bring the whole school, and respectable girlhood more generally, in the view of the headmistress, into disrepute. This was especially the case of the context of the community anxiety generated by World War 1, and the fear that certain sorts of girls were leading soldiers into temptation and spreading venereal disease.

**Rule number one:**

**Boys and girls must not communicate**

Separation of the sexes was a fundamental organisational principle at the Continuation School and later MHS. A cast iron fence had been erected to keep girls and boys apart at the

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31 Report of Margery Robertson, 22 May 1916, Education Department Inward Correspondence, MHS, Unit 30.
Old Model School in the 1850s, and the importance of separate spheres continued from the establishment of the Continuation School in 1905 until its split along gender lines in 1927. From 1905, girls and boys were allocated separate outside activity areas that were monitored by teachers and prefects when the latter were introduced. Girls and boys were not permitted to sit in the same desk during lessons, although boys did sit behind girls; some girls recalled their hair being pulled, silly comments being made, and even attempts to pass notes. Jean Catford remembered the set-up well: ‘There used to be a lot of people sitting two in a desk, but you didn’t ever sit with a boy. But there were boys sitting behind you. I can see one of those boys yet…you know, boys are always teasing and saying stupid things to you’. Helen Manton was careful not to break ‘rule number one’; she simply refrained from speaking to boys. That did not stop her from experiencing harassment, however, and she protested in an interview in 1984, ‘They used to call me Mrs May. Freddie May was the one they used to blame on me. I don’t know why. I just wasn’t interested in boys’.

There were students who did not appear to understand the seriousness of ‘rule number one’ or who, perhaps, were indifferent to the consequences of breaking it. The case of Ruby Baker is a compelling example of this dilemma. Ruby was a sixteen-year-old pupil enrolled in night classes at the Continuation School in 1908. She was, according to Education Department correspondence concerning her behaviour in class, an undisciplined and un-contrite student. During the final week of February and the first week of March 1908, Ruby was ejected from her geography, history, French and geometry classes, accused of talking and giggling on three occasions—once with a male student in her class and twice with another female student. After two or three warnings and her failure to comply, Ruby was asked to leave the classes. Talking in class was bad enough since it challenged the teacher’s authority, particularly if that authority was ignored. Talking to a male student, however, was a most serious misdemeanour, for in breaking school rule number one forbidding any communication between the sexes Ruby Baker, by her behaviour, could destroy her own reputation and reflect badly on the school. There was no possibility of an innocent exchange of pleasantries between young women and men in a Continuation School class, and it would have been assumed that Ruby knew this and would refrain from crossing

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34 Interview with Jean Catford, 11 March 2003.
35 Interview with Helen Manton, 1984.
36 VPRS 10249, Unit 28, Folder 1908/4860. There are eleven documents relating to the Baker case in the file—it was a serious situation in 1908.
37 VPRS 10249, Unit 28, Folder 1908/4860.
the boundaries that had been set up to protect the moral reputations of the students and the school. On another occasion, her French teacher accused Ruby of speaking in an impertinent manner when he called her name during roll call. Ruby compounded the problem by remonstrating with Mr Sharpe after class, questioning his remarks about her, and adding that she had answered in the ‘voice that God had given her’. Joseph Hocking expelled Ruby after documenting the incidents, but she refused to accept her expulsion, writing instead to the Education Department to request a full and thorough investigation of her case. According to Ruby, her conduct deserved, at worst, a reprimand from the principal, and she noted that on no occasion had Joseph Hocking ever issued a warning before expelling her. A departmental officer subsequently interrogated Ruby, in due course finding her to have been unfairly and harshly treated. He recommended her reinstatement and the girl returned to evening classes in May.\(^\text{38}\) In retrospect, it is remarkable that the boundaries Ruby challenged did not prove unassailable for her as a female student. Ruby failed to conform, to heed the messages that had been given out repeatedly about how a girl should behave for the sake of her own reputation and that of her school. Yet, despite her defiance of the rules, she won back her place in night classes, a situation that must have irked Joseph Hocking when his decision to expel her was overturned. Records show that Ruby resigned from the Department later that year, even though she had received satisfactory teaching reports from her headmaster at East Brighton State School.\(^\text{39}\)

Ruby Baker was not the only girl who breached that most serious of all the school rules: rule number one. Both Janet Robertson, a senior girl in 1908, and Dorothy Tate, daughter of Director of Education Frank Tate, had their names recorded in the examination book for serious breaches of the rule at school. Fortunately for Janet, her reputation as an excellent student prior to her infraction saw her permitted to complete her studies. Such a black mark, however, would have taken some ‘working off’. As Dorothy’s name does not reappear in the school examination book, which recorded rule breaches (generally relating to behaviour, honesty and attitude), it can be assumed that she, too, learned her lesson. Dorothy eventually matriculated very well, winning a university exhibition, and followed her father into the teaching profession.\(^\text{40}\)

\(^{38}\) VPRS 10249, Unit 28, Folder 1908/4860. See also MCS Examination Book, 1905, MGHS Archive.

\(^{39}\) VPRS 10249, Unit 28, Folder 1908/4860.

\(^{40}\) MCS Examination Book, 1905, MGHS Archive.
Louise Mackay identified ‘rule number one’ as the most important rule in the school during her schooldays at Spring Street, according to Sunny Acreman (Cecil). Louise argued, however, there was no good reason for the separation of the sexes in the early decades of the school’s existence because, in her experience, ‘adolescents reached sexual maturity much later in the 1920s than in contemporary times’.\(^\text{41}\) She remembers thinking how bizarre it was to see girls and boys who might have attended kindergarten together sitting on opposite sides of a classroom, forbidden to speak to one another. Still, she adds, some boys and girls found ways to circumvent the rule by passing lesson notes to each other in class. Usually, however, ‘pupils were too busy to flout the rule, which extended into out-of-school life’. Linda Cuthill (Pump), who came to the school three years after Louise Mackay, agreed with the latter’s interpretation of the rule. Looking back on her school days in Pallas 1994, Linda thought the rule to be nonsensical given that ‘quite a few of us married boys from our forms in later years’.\(^\text{42}\) Pupils who did flout rule number one risked their places and positions within the school, as we saw in the case of Ruby Baker. The school examination book for 1905–06 reveals a ‘serious infraction’ by a male and a female head prefect who attended a Shakespearean matinee together one Saturday afternoon. They were discovered, reported and punished, their prizes as head prefects being withheld—a considerable embarrassment for them and a graphic lesson for their peers.

The presence of ‘rule number one’ did not prevent girls from being interested in the opposite sex, according to Jean Catford: ‘Being the age we were, we had our eyes on the boys at times. And they probably had their eyes on us. If you met them on a tram you certainly weren’t allowed to speak to them. We were supposed to keep apart’. Sometimes boys had crushes on girls, but, according to former students’ stories, feelings were not always reciprocated, with boys’ hesitant approaches often not welcomed. Evie Wallace recalled the case of a pimply-faced young man (who ‘later became an eminent physicist working on the atom bomb during the Second World War’\(^\text{43}\)) who had a crush on her. According to Evie, the young man would regularly bring her a silver stick (a chocolate-covered confectionary), much to her dismay, for she neither invited nor desired what could be construed as a romantic overture. Evie remembered boys being a constant subject of discussion among girls at Spring Street, despite rule number one. She recalled a dozen or so girls sitting on the front lawn of the Continuation School on Friday afternoons discussing sexual matters (procreation for example), although eighty years on she could not remember

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\(^{42}\) Linda Cuthill (Pump), *PN*, August 1994, p. 4.

\(^{43}\) Interview with Evie Wallace, 9 August 2002.
the specifics of those conversations. As a young woman who preferred the company of level-headed young men because they were ‘steadier’ than girls who spent their spare time talking tacitly (or pretending to) about sex and romance, Evie claimed that she was more interested in friendship than sex at that time. That said, Evie believed that girls she knew at MHS were quite circumspect in the 1920s, regardless of their lunchtime conversations: ‘In those days, girls weren’t as sexy as they are now. It was more fun than sex in the 1920s. We had a lot of fun with the boys then—uncomplicated fun.’

Separation of the sexes was not simply a moral matter, as Joseph Hocking’s refusal to allow student debate on rule number one in 1919. Public debate on single-sex schooling might create doubt about MHS’s future as a co-educational high school. Nevertheless, until 1927 there were times when fraternisation between the sexes was appropriate, sports days for example, as long as students lived up to the expectations that they behave like young ladies and young gentlemen. Annual exchange visits between Adelaide High School (AHS) and MHS were organised around sporting competitions, with each school vying for the ultimate honour of champion. Girls were permitted and expected in the early years to barrack enthusiastically (but in a ladylike manner) for the boys who represented the schools. This was before the girls were allowed to compete themselves. The early school sports days—important social events in Melbourne—were an opportunity for girls and boys to share a common space, but the girls were spectators and barrackers whilst the boys competed. There was a special race, however, a ladies’ nomination race, and Joseph Hocking would allow each girl to ask a boy to run for her. Joe Varey ran for Alberta Watson in 1907 and won. Joe won many races that day, but Alberta was delighted and flattered when she, too, received a prize—a pair of hatpins adorned with acorns.

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44 Interview with Evie Wallace, 9 August 2002. What girls might have meant by ‘sexual lives’ in the 1920s may have a different meaning in the twenty-first century.
45 And yet, this was a time of public concern about girls in public, about them smoking, drinking cocktails, dancing and attending the cinema where they watched suggestive Hollywood films featuring such stars as Rudolph Valentino. See Jill Julius Matthews, 1984, Good and Mad Women: The Historical Construction of Femininity in the Twentieth Century, Allen and Unwin, Sydney for an analysis of the ambiguities and conflicts in contemporary constructions of female sexuality.
46 Interview with Evie Wallace, 9 August 2002.
47 See Joseph Hocking, chapter two.
49 Interview with Alberta Watson, 8 November 1982.
50 Ours magazines from 1907 to 1927 contain photographs of these events and they show that public figures were always in attendance.
Being a MGHS/Mac.Rob girl 1928–65

A girl in the Depression—making do

This big, enormous place [Melbourne], and getting on a tram and all of that was quite unknown to me. I had no idea.

Muriel Cant, 1925

I know it is peculiar of me to prefer learning about geology and evolution and maths and history to doing womanly work like scrubbing floors and peeling potatoes, but I do. At school they give me work to do and I do it, generally very well. They are pleased, I am pleased.

Shirley Painter, The Bean Patch

Many of the women who came forward to help with this school history and be interviewed attended Mac.Rob during the Depression. Their stories illustrate the complexities of what it meant to be a girl at Mac.Rob during those years and, equally importantly, what it meant to be able to receive a secondary education when the majority of girls in the state education system left school as soon as they turned fourteen, the school leaving age at the time. With the state government intent on closing down high schools, particularly girls’ schools, as a cost-cutting measure, and widespread unemployment and family separations as husbands and fathers left home to find work wherever they could, the Depression also influenced who could get in to Mac.Rob and retain their places.

For some girls, the Depression made already difficult lives far worse. Some former students had fathers who drank too much, making it even more difficult for their families to get by and for school fees to be paid. A number of girls had abusive fathers, some of whom might not have been so abusive but for the misfortune of being unemployed. Shirley Painter was

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51 Interview with Muriel Cant, 17 July 2002.
54 Former students’ stories of their memories of the Depression years tend to be optimistic and courageous in depicting experiences and feelings, even in what may have been the worst of circumstances for themselves and their families. Comparatively, they could not have been that bad if they were still alive to tell the story, and managed to actually attend the school. David Potts in The Myth of the Great Depression, challenges traditional representations of the Depression, arguing that many who lived through those years found positive outcomes in their experiences.
one girl who worked hard to keep her home and school life separate during the Depression. The daughter of an abusive, manipulative father, Shirley was an outstanding student, but educational success came at a heavy cost when it created an unwelcome bridge between her two worlds. If a girl had painstakingly created separate existences for herself, as Shirley did, any academic success she achieved could potentially trigger an outburst of rage from her father. Thus, the announcement that Shirley was dux of the school caused her concern rather than celebration, because it was difficult to predict how her father would resolve her success with his own lack of it. Shirley’s experience of being a Mac.Rob girl between 1931 and 1934 was one of constant negotiation of every aspect of her life, including poverty when her family lost everything in the Depression, of being a swot, too frightened to make a move on a boy when other girls were going out drinking and dancing, and of being an educated girl, the idea of which her father constantly ridiculed. Her father concluded: ‘It’s those books…All she thinks about is those bloody books! It’s not natural! She’s got her head in the clouds! And it’s that bloody school she goes to—nothing but girls and a lot of old maids’. 

Shirley did not always manage to negotiate successfully the thin line that separated school and home. When the headmistress learned that she had been unwell, she invited her to attend, free of charge, the annual school camp at Phillip Island. How could a girl go on a camp when she had nothing to wear though? Shirley described the shame she felt when members of staff stepped in to help her: ‘They have ordered…from Myers’ Emporium, two dresses in my size. I try them on in the headmistress’s office, exposing my grubby singlet and raggy pants, and I begin to cry’. Shirley went on to matriculate brilliantly with first and second class honours, winning a senior government scholarship and an exhibition to Trinity College. She became a secondary school teacher and, in her retirement, published her autobiography.

Wynne Higgins also found the life she had known completely changed as a result of the Depression: ‘At the end of 1930 my parents were buying a house. My father was out of work; they couldn’t keep up the payments and we had to move. We had no money at all for about two months and lived in one room in somebody else’s house’. Ennis Honey

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56 Painter, The Bean Patch, pp. 139–43.
57 Painter, The Bean Patch, p. 143.
58 Interview with Wynne Higgins, 28 August 2003.
(O’Callaghan)’s family moved no fewer than seven times during the Depression and she worked hard to keep her private and school worlds separate:

[My family] moves first to Caulfield to be near our schools. Then, as every street in every suburb has several empty houses as a result of the depression, we move to Brighton, to three houses in one street in Murrumbeena…then to two houses at Camberwell, to a beautiful two-storey house in Ivanhoe near the river, to Northcote, to Brunswick, to Balwyn, to Chadstone, to Caulfield and back to Malvern…So far I have been able to keep my two worlds quite successfully apart. I don’t talk about school at home and I don’t talk about home at school. Nobody seems to notice.59

In her autobiography Ennis reveals how she mastered the skills of survival by learning how to save money, cleverly ‘stretching the budget to its meagre limits’, and she worked hard to stave off the humiliation she was sure would come if a classmate discovered her engaged in the various money-saving and money-making activities she undertook during the Depression.60

Elizabeth Brown (Taylor) would have ended up in a factory, once she had completed year eight at Elwood Central School, but for her mother’s determination to see her three daughters receive ‘at least a basic secondary education’, which meant remaining at school instead of going into the workforce when they turned fourteen.61 After seeing the effects of the Depression on girls who lacked a good general secondary education, Elizabeth’s mother sent her to Mac.Rob in 1935, the year after the school opened on its current site. Elizabeth left two years later, armed with her Intermediate Certificate, and, with the school’s assistance, found a job. That first job was in a ‘ghastly basement warehouse in Flinders Lane’, but, because she kept in touch with her old school, she eventually found better work with a firm of solicitors, thanks to her principal, Mary Hutton’s, intervention. Elizabeth wanted to complete her education and she did. Enrolling at Taylor’s night school, she matriculated in 1939 and entered the teaching profession, eventually becoming a secondary school principal, motivated perhaps by her former headmistress’s message that ‘there is nothing inferior about being female’.62

60 Honey, Nymphs and Goddesses, pp. 65–71.
61 Interview with Elizabeth Brown (Taylor), 6 September 2004.
Experiences of hardship were diverse. Lorna Dennis, who attended MGHS at Government House, was one of six children whose father ran a guest house in St Kilda, where they lived for a short time. Although Lorna’s family moved around quite a bit as her father changed employment, she recalled that ‘the family always had food on the table in the Depression [because my] father was employed in the food business’. Muriel Cant considered her family fortunate not to be seriously affected by the Depression, although she saw the effects of it every day: ‘We always managed to have enough to eat, and clothes on our back, but they were very difficult times, really difficult times. People were losing houses and couldn’t keep their payments up, and that was not a good time, not good at all.’ For Jean Catford, the effects of the Depression on working-class women and their families hit home the year after she completed high school in 1928. Jean and four other girls were billeted with a woman and her four children in a compact terrace house in Parkville, near the teacher training college. The five college girls shared a room at the top of the house, and the bathroom, with its earthen floor, was in the back yard. The landlady and her children lived in one room under the stair case, ‘somehow getting by’, as Jean reflected with quiet admiration long afterwards.

Fitting in

_We bought a few clothes at the summer sales [no school clothes were required then]...a completely new life opened out for me; so new that I did not realise how stupid it was to take a slate to school with me._

Doris McRae, 1908

_Girls coming from small country schools are bewildered by the multiplicity of new sensations, of new ideas of laws to conform to, of duties to be performed._

_Pallas,_ 1929

_All of a sudden we had these Jewish girls going to the school. They weren’t going to private schools, they were going to Mac.Rob. That was a terribly exciting thing._

Nancy Young (Dunstan), 1940s

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63 Telephone interview with Lorna Dennis, 6 March 2003.
64 Interview with Muriel Cant, 17 July 2001.
65 Interview with Jean Catford, 11 March 2003.
66 Interview with Doris McRae, 1982.
67 _Pallas_, 19 May 1929, p. 4.
68 Focus Group, Salford Park, 27 September 2002. Interview with Nancy Young (Dunstan), 9 October 2002 at Salford Park.
In my mind it kind of melds with novels you read about girls’ schools. It was a bit like that. I got on fine with all the teachers. I might have been caught a few times for not wearing my gloves, but it wasn’t a problem. It just seemed to me to be an unnecessary way to organise life at all. I was a bit puzzled by this. I think even then I was a bit inclined to be quite a utilitarian person. If something doesn’t seem to be necessary, why are we doing it?

Lois Bryson (Hobson) 1954

When Jean Ayres (Fenton) came to MGHS in 1929, her working-class background was on her mind. As a new girl she felt an unmistakable sense of class difference. This meant that being a MGHS girl was hard at times because, in Jean’s experience, girls from middle-class suburbs did not always accept a girl from Oakleigh, an outer working-class suburb at the time. Middle-class girls at times would not sit with girls from working-class suburbs in the train. ‘But then’, Jean qualifies, ‘I didn’t have that many that came on my line anyway’. Jean’s first friend at school came from Clifton Hill and the bond they shared was, in Jean’s opinion, based mostly on their common working-class origins. Jean was very happy at MGHS and did not want to leave, but the time was right, and, as her sights were not set on higher education, there seemed to be no point in continuing on. After working for six months, she joined the family enterprise, eventually taking on the role of manager of a business her father had purchased from a man who had gone broke during the Depression. Jean came to MGHS as a young woman already skilled in aspects of business management, used to sharing in the responsibility for her family’s economic well-being. A serious girl, she had no boyfriends and never went out dancing; there were other priorities. Jean eventually joined the army and in doing so reconnected with her old school in a way reminiscent of the story told at the beginning of this chapter of two former Mac.Rob girls meeting in a crowded lift in London:

The very first day I entered the army, we were going to Heidelberg, and I was on the railway station in Melbourne catching the train out. I met a lass who was also going to Heidelberg to enter the army, just like myself. It turned out that she had also been to MGHS. She was a bit younger than me, but we stayed together for years and years. During (barracks) inspections they would always know where Jean and Gwyn (Williams) lived, as the other girls were so untidy; but we would say “potens sui” to each other—this was our thing.

69 Interview with Lois Bryson (Hobson), 23 August 2002.
Girls generally entered MGHS and Mac.Rob from state elementary and high schools, but a small proportion also came from independent schools. Ailsa Thomson Zainu’ddin, in her history of Methodist Ladies College (MLC), mentions a girl she describes as an ‘escapee’ to Mac.Rob. This 1940s girl left MLC quite happy to become a Mac.Rob girl because of what she perceived as the less stringent emphasis placed on being the perfect young lady at all times. She was relieved that, at Mac.Rob ‘the ladylike image…had suffered such a battering that in summer we were allowed to appear in short socks, instead of the lisle armour which at Methodist Ladies’ College (MLC) preserved our sanctity while the temperature rose’.  

This girl, Zainu’ddin argues, was ‘fleeing the oppressive MLC atmosphere for the elitist academic rivalries of Mac.Rob’.

In 1954, Lois Bryson (Hobson) came to Mac.Rob from Hampton High School to do her matriculation year. Because of an agreement between the state government and the private school sector, most state high schools in the south-eastern and eastern suburbs did not offer the matriculation (Leaving Honours) year then. Changing schools at such a critical time saw Lois move ‘from a position of big fish to that of little fish’, but the Mac.Rob girls made the Hampton High girls very welcome, Lois recalled. Imagine coming in to a prominent school in the final year. How did a girl begin to make sense of and connect with the traditions, the modus operandi and structures most of the students had taken for granted for years? For Lois there was a ‘clash of cultures’ between how it was at Mac.Rob and how it had been at Hampton, and she came to resent the strict discipline at Mac.Rob. In her mind, as a sixteen-year-old, she did not need to be treated with what appeared to her as ‘draconian strictness’. The unremitting focus on the correct wearing of hats and gloves was frustrating and unnecessary. So too, as she understood it, was an embedded assumption that the Mac.Rob girl could indeed afford all the pieces of the compulsory uniform. In Lois’s experience, the girls who came to Mac.Rob for the final year were at a disadvantage as they had not been able to build up a cultural understanding of the school. Mac.Rob was a foreign country with a different way of doing things. To her it seemed that Mac.Rob catered mainly to middle-class and lower middle-class girls who were ignorant of the ‘knock-down drag-out life’ that she had experienced at Hampton High; things that were commonplace at Hampton High were anathema at Mac.Rob. The ritual of boys being lined up to be given the strap whilst the girls peered in at them through the windows, waving at them to lighten the

71 Thomson Zainu’ddin, They Dreamt of a School, pp. 281–2
72 See McCalman, Journeyings, p. 122.
73 Interview with Lois Bryson (Hobson), 23 August 2002.
proceedings, would have been unimaginable to most Mac.Rob girls and their teachers. Even the way things were done at Mac.Rob was different. Where there were class gardening bees at Hampton High, with students helping to plant trees and shrubs, Mac.Rob had a gardener.

**Mac.Rob does not always suit every girl**

*We knew there was work to be done and we did it. We didn’t have all the other things going on in our lives as people do today. It was a very different way of life.*

Jessie Clark (Tilbrook), 1948–51

*One incident I remember was when the science teacher was explaining sexual reproduction. We were all rather naïve in those days, so one of the girls asked, “How does a sperm get into the egg?” A visibly embarrassed teacher had to explain that the male puts his penis…*

Gladys Clarke Rudge, 1946–49

*I found myself AFTER leaving Mac.Rob.*

Barbara Bryan (Davies), 1963–65

While some girls found it hard to settle in, others took to Mac.Rob easily, thoroughly enjoying school life. Jessie Clarke (Tilbrook), a farmer’s daughter, came to Mac.Rob from Horsham in 1948. Jessie’s previous schooling had been at a small private Presbyterian girls’ school, which, whilst a happy place to be, did not, in her opinion, teach her anything. Her parents wanted her to have a good education, something they had not been given themselves, so they sent Jessie to board with relatives, initially an elderly aunt and uncle and later an aunt who took in other boarders as well. Jessie recalls her first day at Mac.Rob and what it was like to be a stranger among hundreds of other girls:

*I didn’t know anybody. That didn’t take long though. I soon made friends. I can remember coming in. We all had to go up to the hall and our classes were allocated. We were brought down to our classroom, which was near the*

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74 Interview with Lois Bryson (Hobson), 23 August 2002.
75 Interview with Jessie Clark (Tilbrook), 23 August 2003.
76 Gladys Clark (Rudge) in letter to P. Parker.
77 Barbara Bryan (Davies), E-mail narrative, 28 November 2004.
bottom of the stairwell and we went through the formal procedure of the roll call; and then we started talking to people around us. We all started chatting, and there we are.\footnote{Interview with Jessie Clark (Tilbrook), 23 August 2003.}

Being a Mac.Rob girl was, to Jessie, something that she understood retrospectively as a great privilege. As she remarks, ‘We just didn’t realise it at the time’. It was very clear to the girls what was expected of them at Mac.Rob and Jessie remembers those expectations well:

\[\text{When we came here, there was just this atmosphere of role models and you’d just come here to learn. It wasn’t a question of who you were or what you were. You were here to learn and everything was available to us. Right from the start we knew what was expected of us. There was no question of that. We didn’t have to think about it. You were aware if somebody fell short. I remember Miss Hutton gathered us all together in the quadrangle to tell us that somebody had contacted the school and reported a conversation between two Mac.Rob girls they had overheard, an unwise conversation., and she was amazed that anybody from Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School should speak like that, let alone speak like that in public.}\footnote{Interview with Jessie Clark, (Tilbrook), 23 August 2003.}

For Gladys Clarke (Rudge), who attended Mac.Rob between 1946 and 1949, the most important thing about the school was that it widened her world; its social and cultural vibrancy stand out in her memory. She remembers meeting students ‘who included ex-servicewomen, European refugees, members of different faiths, and blind girls’. As Gladys recalls, the ex-servicewomen, who were studying under the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme, did not have to wear school uniform. ‘And’, she adds, ‘it was rumoured that in their “common room” (a storeroom behind room 9), they were allowed to smoke’. According to Gladys, cultural diversity among the students made school both interesting and exciting. ‘And the food’, she continues: ‘In school lunches and at birthday parties at home we ate unleavened bread, rollmops, Lenten diets, pasta twiddled around a fork, and, bliss–\textit{Sachertorte}.\footnote{\textit{Sachertorte} is a chocolate cake of Viennese origin.} Gladys adds that the friends she made at school remain her friends to this day.\footnote{Gladys Clarke (Rudge) in letter to P. Parker.}
Just as Jessie and Gladys loved every moment of Mac.Rob, Barbara Bryan (Davies) considered that it was not the right school for her. Barbara, a student between 1963 and 1965, believed in retrospect that a school such as University High School would have suited her interests better. In looking back at her schooling experiences, she felt that a girl like her, who was not a brilliant student, was not supported in the same ways as girls who were outstanding scholars, sportswomen and musicians.\textsuperscript{82} Being somewhat timid as a young student, Barbara remembers feeling belittled by the actions and attitudes of other girls, including when she was ‘dumped from the school cross-ball team in favour of the cross-ball captain’s friend’.\textsuperscript{83} Girls were not encouraged to speak up for themselves at the time, she argues, and she believes that as a girl she lacked the confidence to assert herself in any case. She remembers feeling intimidated by other girls, particularly the Jewish girls, who were strongly academic and who, in her memory, dominated much of school life.

According to Barbara, she found herself after leaving Mac.Rob, but her departure at the end of Leaving Certificate (year 11) was fought by her parents and Laura Trickett, the deputy principal. When they urged her to stay, Barbara continues, she became more determined to leave—and so she did, to become a trainee draughtsperson. By the time she was 23 years of age she had travelled around Australia and overseas. Since leaving Mac.Rob, Barbara has enjoyed five very diverse careers, her current passion being photography and the outdoors.\textsuperscript{84} She is happy. Perhaps she expected certain things of Mac.Rob that it could not offer her; perhaps it was not receptive to her needs just as she was not receptive to its culture.

It is not the business of this history to reconcile girls’ experiences of being at Mac.Rob, for girls’ worlds are naturally various and their lives are not seamless. They do not always have a great deal in common. Some girls who disliked the school have done well regardless, whereas others have not done well because they needed assistance and were unable to get it. In the end, Barbara had the courage to do what she needed to do for herself in 1965, but not everyone was as determined and sure about what they did and did not want for themselves.

Judith Buckrich, a student in the later 1960s, loved being a Mac.Rob girl. She found the diverse social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds of the students vibrant and stimulating, but nonetheless saw herself as a girl who, raised in a left-wing family, resisted the values and

\textsuperscript{82} Barbara Bryan (Davies), E-mail narrative, 28 November 2004.
\textsuperscript{83} Barbara Bryan (Davies), E-mail narrative, 28 November 2004.
\textsuperscript{84} Barbara Bryan (Davies), E-mail narrative, 28 November 2004.
norms espoused by Mac.Rob, particularly those extolled by her first principal, Daphne Barrett. Judith’s experience of being at Mac.Rob reveals her deep attraction to the great diversity of the student population:

When I got into fifth form, school started to bore me a little bit, and I got very interested in boys. I also became really interested in politics and in the whole anti-Vietnam war thing. There were girls from every walk of life at Mac.Rob. You met girls from the whole kind of gamut of society. I was actually meeting girls who were the children of academics or the children of a folk singer and a writer who was a very radical woman.85

Judith recalls meeting Clare Balmford, daughter of songwriter, poet, historian and novelist, Glen Tomasetti,86 who became a dear friend. She used to visit Clare at her home and as a result a whole new world revealed itself to her:

Clare and I became great friends. And I started going to her place. And, you know, the place was full of artists. Suddenly the whole thing…a kind of the academic thing…I could feel that I was actually going the other way and I wanted to kind of become a bit of a bohemian really. That suited me much better than someone who is just going to get high marks and go to university. And I became more and more kind of a deconstructed person in a way as time went on. And I kind of let myself, like some of us did, just go with the flow and see how that worked; not saying to become something, but just…you know—wow, all these fantastic ideas…ideas about how to live and what is important and what isn’t. And I just said to myself, go with that and enjoy it.87

Girls and boys

Young ladies, we had been warned, did not speak to boys on trams or trains or in the street. Members of the public might recognise our uniform and the school would get a bad name.

Ennis Honey (O’Callaghan), Nymphs and Goddesses88

85 Interview with Judith Buckrich, 12 October 2003.
86 For information on Glenys (Glen) Ann Tomasetti, see Claire Wright, ‘A Life’s Song for the heart and Soul of Australia’, Age, Obituaries, 1 August 2003, p. 9.
87 Interview with Judith Buckrich.
88 Honey, Nymphs and Goddesses, p. 32.
Try not to wear your heart on your sleeve.

Advice to girls by Sybil Llewelyn, temporary headmistress 1933

Senior girls were...forbidden to sit and eat their lunch along the north wall. The sight of so much bare female flesh (girls in bobby socks) was thought likely to inflame the truck drivers as they drove towards South Melbourne.

Amirah Inglis (Gust), Amirah: An un-Australian Childhood

Strict rules about communication between the sexes did not mean that girls did not think about and discuss boys. On the contrary, the opposite sex was a subject of regular discussion among some girls. Former Mac.Rob girls in interviews for this history evoke images of red-faced boys on trams and trains as girls laughed and giggled, leading those boys to believe that they were the subjects of their talk and amusement. Girls tell of seeing and meeting boys on trams and trains (a contrast to the days when Joseph Hocking and Claude Searby were principals and forbade even brothers and sisters from travelling together on the same train), of girls sharing their romantic hopes and desires, but never in such a manner that might have drawn the wrong kind of attention from other passengers, attention that might bring the school into disrepute and get a girl into trouble. Public spaces were just that—public—and there was always some concerned, righteous citizen who might ring the school to complain about a girl’s unladylike behaviour. Prefects were equally vigilant; thus girls were under constant surveillance from the moment they left home in the morning. Regardless of the ban on communication between the sexes, quite a few girls and boys married having met at school, and, even with the passage of time, a MHS boy remembered a Mac.Rob girl he once knew and wondered what had become of her. Bert Whelan wrote to the Palladians Newsletter editor in February 1993 looking for Betty Harvey, whom he had known when he was a MHS boy and she a Mac.Rob girl in the late 1940s and early 1950s. It is not known whether he was able to track her down.

According to Ennis Honey (O’Callaghan), the 1935 ‘A’ formers (Leaving Honours students) were generally not interested in boys; most girls gave priority to their studies and whatever else was going on in their lives, including church, music lessons, family, leisure time and

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89 Honey, Nymphs and Goddesses, p.146.
working in part-time jobs. A social for the 1935 sixth form classes was considered, according to Ennis, and dancing was approved, but boys were not. There was some thought given to inviting the sixth form boys from MHS that year, she acknowledges, but headmistress Mary Hutton prudently decided that ‘they would not feel comfortable’. ⁹²

Twenty years later (during the Barrett era), according to Shirley Anderson, boys were still not a major issue, at least until the later years of schooling. Shirley explains:

The first years I was there we probably talked about horses and sport and then as you got older you talked about boys; boys took the focus. And of course, I always had male friends. I wasn’t the sort of a girl that had no male contacts one day and then a boyfriend the next. In fact, my first little boyfriend, John, I used to play footy with in the streets. Then, one day, he said, “Do you want to go to the pictures together?” and I said, “Oh, all right”, so it was a gradual transition to having male admirers. ⁹³

Shirley cannot recall girls being boy-crazy, although, she adds, ‘I did have a sense that most girls had boyfriends’:

In fact one of the prefects…an Asian girl who never talked about boys, who never looked at boys…a couple of years after she left school she got pregnant—and she must have met some boy somewhere. I don’t think it was an aberration; I think that girls just didn’t talk about boys a lot at school. I didn’t have any problems talking with or about them. I think that a lot of girls did go out with boys but they did it on the quiet. ⁹⁴

Roe Wise fell in love while she was at Mac.Rob in the 1960s. The daughter of Jewish immigrant parents who had survived the Holocaust, Roe came to Mac.Rob via Gardenvale Central School. During a summer holiday at Mt Buffalo, when she was in Intermediate (year ten), Roe met Colin, and they were together off and on until matriculation year, when they decided to break up. They did eventually marry, however, when Roe was 20. Looking back, Roe thinks that at 16 she was probably too young to be having a relationship with a boy and she acknowledges that her love-life did interfere with her study. She did, however, return to

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⁹² Honey, Nymphs and Goddesses, p. 222.
⁹³ Interview with Shirley Anderson, 15 March 2005.
⁹⁴ Interview with Shirley Anderson, 15 March 2005.
university as a mature-age student once her children were at school, and graduated in Arts after five years of study.\(^95\)

According to Renata Singer (Klein), in contrast, some Mac.Rob girls were ‘completely obsessed with boys’ throughout the 1960s:

My group were obsessed with all that adolescent stuff. We were very “bad” girls really. All we did was think about who we would meet on the tram. Half the time we didn’t even go to school, we just stayed on the tram and went to the Victoria Market. We used to wag all the time, and then we’d get caught. And then we’d go shoplifting. We were really, really, really not your ideal pupil. But we were quite smart, so we got away with a little bit. All got suspended one time. I can’t remember what we did when we got suspended. Our parents were called in. So we weren’t really model students.\(^96\)

**Schoolgirl crushes**

Whatever the era, and whatever the school’s name, the Mac.Rob girl has loved and is loved. In addition to crushes on boys, crushes on prefects, teachers and other girls have been common, although a few speak of this in hushed tones, and often do not wish to be identified in reminiscing about ‘such things’ for the school history. In some interviews, former students state that they often had crushes on prefects, and that they would gaze longingly at them or daydream about them. For some, remembering a crush on another girl, particularly a prefect, evokes laughter and embarrassment, and wonder that she could ever have felt like that. For others, the memory was of wanting passionately to be just like ‘so and so’. Still others cannot recall having a crush on anyone at all at school.

A schoolgirl crush could be based on another girl’s physical attractiveness, her stature, or her confident poise and demeanour. A girl might see another girl and think to herself, ‘I want to be just like her’. Girls could also desire to emulate another girl’s talent at music, drama or writing for example. Some girls looked up to prefects, particularly the head prefect, giving them iconic status as living symbols of the ideal girl. Lilian Efron recalled vividly her experience of having a crush, adding: ‘But I really was a silly young girl. I had

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\(^95\) Interview with Roe Wise, 23 February 2005.  
\(^96\) Interview with Renata Singer (Klein), 26 July 2003.
tremendous crushes on the prefects’. Lilian’s insight into the world of the schoolgirl crush is important as she recalls that her crushes were usually responsive to being acknowledged, even just spoken to, by prefects, an often unexpected experience. In 1930 a girl wrote in Pallas about just such an experience in relation to her teachers:

Oh! To be like Miss Blank or Miss Dash! This is the one thing my soul longs for. To see myself as either of these exclusive and majestic figures! To pass with honours all my subjects as did they! To have that cool, calm and collected manner!…Thus mused I, all alone, unadorned and excitable with few acquaintances and fewer friends. But then I think of Miss Dash, who gave me a slight smile (but only one of sympathy for my ignorance) and Miss Blank’s voice directed to me (but only to reprove me). Yet I am thankful for all small mercies, for generally these exalted personages sweep past me in disdain. I have been told that schoolgirl admiration is as changeable as Melbourne weather; but I have been in this restless and unhappy state for six weeks. But I must work! I must endeavour to create that imposing atmosphere about me. But—oh! Oh! To be like Miss Blank and Miss Dash!

Crushes on teachers were common as impressionable girls, often from worlds well apart from those of their teachers, dreamed about being like these women, of emulating their appearance and their seemingly attractive lives as independent beings in control of their worlds. Ennis Honey (O’Callaghan) had a serious crush on Daisy Searby, the daughter of Claude Searby, the principal who forced the separation of MHS in 1927. Daisy had generously purchased new clothes for Ennis, and had afterwards taken her to tea in Collins Street, Ennis’s first time in a tea shop. A grand piano playing softly in the background, crisply uniformed waitresses, silver tea service, an array of dainty sandwiches and cakes, and the experience of genuine warm companionship all made Ennis want to grow up ‘to be a real lady just like Miss Searby’. Ennis’s crush was as much about Daisy Searby’s ladylike qualities as it was about her lifestyle. Searby’s kindness, her sensitivity to her student’s circumstances and her natural tact were appealing and something worth emulating for a young girl.

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97 Interview with Lilian Efron, 11 September 2002.
99 Honey, Nymphs and Goddesses, p. 171.
One group of former students from the Barrett era referred to the prefects as icons, remembering how as young girls they ‘looked up to them so much and many had crushes on them’. Great hilarity ensued as names were named and experiences remembered. It was not just prefects who were the focus of crushes though. Many girls, according to this group, also had crushes on the younger teachers: ‘We were very aware of and influenced by such things as their clothes, their general appearance.’\(^{100}\) Being the object of awe or affection was not always immediately understood, however. Lois Bryson (Hobson), who had come to the school only to complete her matriculation year, recalled being surprised when junior girls would open doors for her because she was a senior.\(^{101}\)

Into the twenty-first century, the idea of a girl having a crush upon a teacher or a fellow student in a leadership position produces mixed responses—almost always from laughter to disdain at the very idea of such a thing. Girls admit that they might admire certain teachers for how well they do their jobs—these women and men are positive role models, although girls might not aspire to be like them, they value their professional competencies and dedication. They also value those who help them in particular circumstances, who go out of their way to be supportive and empowering in difficult times.

**Success and failure**

*Mac.Robertson GHS, as with most other girls’ schools today, does not specifically aim to turn out a girl who is a better cook, better seamstress, better typist than the girl of some years ago. It aims to turn out a better woman...The girl at MGHS is trained to think for herself, to solve her own problems as they arise, to meet emergencies with knowledge gained from her school training...But they are not trained to believe that these capabilities (domestic sciences) are the be-all and end-all of a woman’s existence. They are given the best possible training to help them in their chosen careers. Extra curricular activities are designed, too, to help today’s girl to fit herself to her place in the world*

‘Today’s Girl’, *Australasian Post*, 30 December 1948

*At Mac.Rob I discovered what I didn’t want to be.*

Renata Singer (Klein)\(^{102}\)

\(^{100}\) Focus Group, Mount Martha, 26 November 2003.

\(^{101}\) Interview with Lois Bryson (Hobson), 23 August 2002.

While the majority of Mac.Rob girls, until the 1980s at least, accepted the status quo and went into the traditionally female professions of teaching, nursing, social work and office work, a good number refused to accommodate their academic aspirations to society’s expectations of women. Many girls had little choice about their futures in the workplace, as their parents, or the school principal, enrolled them in the commercial course at Mac.Rob rather than the professional course. Some former students feel degrees of regret about missed opportunities as ‘commercial girls’. They feel that they had less than happy schooling experiences because of overt and subtle forms of class distinction directed towards them because they were commercial girls. Nancy Young (Dunstan) had no say in the course of study she followed. Nancy found herself in a commercial class after returning from the summer holidays a week late. She remembers feeling very angry at being put in the lowest form at school (F form) because there was nothing else available. While she concedes her parents would not have let her go on to matriculation, she would like to have been able to do the professional course and ‘go all the way through’.103 One former student regretted that a commercial girl could never become head girl, although Marry Lied (Tunnecliffe), who followed a commercial course, achieved that distinction in 1931. Of course, the majority of commercial students left school after Intermediate and Leaving, so most of the prefects were, as expected, professional (academic) students.104

Such tensions nonetheless suggest that there were very different ideas about the meaning of success and failure among Mac.Rob girls. Success has meant different things to different people. Between 1928 and 1965, success generally meant meeting the standards and expectations of the school, of families, and of society more generally. A girl went to school, did her best, sat the examinations and entered the workforce; a small number went on to university, generally with a scholarship or a teaching studentship. Most girls married after a few years, with many of those born after World War II returning to study and career changes as mature-aged women. Just getting into Mac.Rob was success in itself to many girls, although Renata Singer (Klein) argues that for those who wanted to continue their education it was not really difficult to gain entry to Mac.Rob. In 1960, in Renata’s experience, it was actually hard not to get into Mac.Rob. ‘You had to be really bad’, she

103 Interview with Nancy Young (Dunstan), 9 October 2002 at Salford Park.
104 Interview with Mary Lied (Tunnecliffe), 21 March 2005.
maintains, ‘because there was no local high school in Caulfield. Basically, you had to get above 60 percent, or something. It wasn’t very selective at all’.105

Some former students maintain that success for them came after leaving Mac.Rob; that they were not academically brilliant achievers who were rewarded with high scores at the university examinations. Heather Gunn (Fairlie), for instance, who attended Mac.Rob in the late 1950s, acknowledges that she wasted some of her time at school, having too much fun and not knuckling down to serious study.106 Success, then, might have meant judging themselves according to different criteria. Ultimately, success for some girls is not reducible to a numerical score that gives them entry to university. Some of the girls’ stories may serve to illustrate what they understood about being a Mac.Rob girl and being a success.

Gertrude Rubinstein (Rabinov) was a Jewish girl born five years after her parents migrated to Australia in 1913. Her father, a carpenter by trade, was unable to work because of an eye injury that left him an invalid pensioner. Gertrude entered MGHS at Government House in 1932. She had sat for a scholarship at her central school in North Fitzroy but missed out as only three scholarships were allocated to the school that year. At the end of 1931 she intended to sit again, but she caught the wrong train and missed the examination. Her parents took matters into their own hands after she was accepted as a student (without a scholarship), and applied directly to the school for financial assistance. As a result, the yearly school fees were suspended and Gertrude was awarded a book allowance of two pounds. She sat for a scholarship yet again, and was successful.107

Gertrude became head prefect in her final year. Even though she came from a working-class background and often had to wear second-hand clothes purchased from the local ‘op shop’, she was a success story, for she displayed the desirable attributes of leadership. She epitomised the kind of girl the school promoted historically (part of that being to give the deserving poor a leg-up to higher education), and did very well academically. She was an ideal model of how a working-class girl could make good and the kind of girl the school was happy to ‘hang its hat on’. Gertrude passed the university examination and, in her first

105 Interview with Renata Singer (Klein), 26 July 2003.
106 Heather Gunn (Fairlie) to P. Parker 15 March 2002. Heather, of course, did a degree and, later, a doctorate at La Trobe University when her children had grown up. She was also a very active member of the school centenary history group.
107 Interview with Gertrude Rubinstein (Rabinov), 2 October 2002. Requests for financial assistance became common during the Depression years, so important was it for parents to keep their daughters at school in times of severe unemployment, or to ensure that they received an education that would significantly improve their employment prospects when there was massive competition for jobs.
year at Melbourne University, won several exhibitions. These were cash awards, according to Gertrude, but the money was used for family rather than educational needs in her case. Gertrude lived at home, like most girls, until she married at the age of twenty-three, having already graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree. As was the case then with women in the workforce who married, Gertrude was forced to relinquish her position as a senior demonstrator in the science faculty (chemistry) at the university. She eventually returned to do her MSc in chemistry after her children, six sons, were at school and she had spare time for study. Gertrude Rubinstein (Rabinov) is revered in a similar fashion to Ellen Balaam, though her circumstances were very different. Former students describe how she has stood out in their memories as a girl they admired and wanted to be like; she epitomised the success of the girl who achieved her potential in spite of her material circumstances.

Yet, not all girls went to high school at Mac.Rob specifically thinking of achieving academic success, or being successful more generally. Jessie Clark (Tilbrook) is clear that she went to school primarily to receive a good education. Success or failure, according to Jessie, did not figure largely in a girl’s mental world in the 1950s until the final examinations in most cases. She remembers her surprise when her name was linked with success in the school magazine, *Pallas*: ‘Well, my name was in the 1952 *Pallas* as a successful student the previous year. I remember being absolutely amazed when I got the letter! Me! Making me out to be…It was quite a thrill. It really was’.

Judith Buckrich, from the Barrett and Carr eras, measures success for herself in different ways, including whether or not she managed to retain her own integrity as a student and as a woman. Thinking about the meaning of success to her, Judith states, ‘Miss Carr thought I was a success’, a significant observation given that Judith was quite a radical girl in the late 1960s, and a girl who respected her former principal deeply. Judith, however, judges herself ‘not a success in contemporary terms’, because she was not confident going through university, not self-assured, ‘(:cocky“) like so many girls in the 21st century’. The idea of success then cannot be contained in time for some women. It is complex and often subjective.

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108 Interview with Gertrude Rubinstein (Rabinov), 2 October 2002.
109 Interview with Jessie Clark (Tilbrook), 23 August 2002.
110 Interview with Judith Buckrich, 12 October 2003.
111 Interview with Judith Buckrich, 12 October 2003.
Success was almost accidental for Elizabeth Alexander. Elizabeth was one of thirty women out of five hundred full-time students who enrolled in a commerce degree at the University of Melbourne in 1961, but she was pragmatic about her future and where her success would lie:

I was one of those aimless schoolgirls who didn’t really have much idea of what they wanted to do. I failed Matriculation French, so that cut out the Arts faculty. Law and Commerce were my options after that. But Law was four years and Commerce only three. When you’re seventeen, three years is a long time. Four years is an eternity.\(^\text{112}\)

According to Elizabeth, about fifteen of the thirty women who enrolled in the commerce degree with her went into teaching, and some married as soon as they completed their studies. Elizabeth entered a profession at a time when there were few women in it, yet she aspired to become a partner in an accounting firm in what was very much a man’s world. She achieved her goal at Price Waterhouse where, she explains, ‘once they realised I was serious about having a career and was prepared to put my shoulder to the wheel to achieve it, my sex became irrelevant’.\(^\text{113}\) Success for Elizabeth was achieving the partnership, but her success had much broader meaning for a girl in the 1960s, because, as a woman, she was a pioneer in her field, epitomising the kind of success Mac.Rob might espouse for its students.

Bronwyn Hewitt (Raper), a musically talented girl, has her own ideas about what constitutes success, and a powerful memory of overcoming her fears dominates her recollections of her school experiences. Bronwyn suffered badly from performance nerves, particularly when performances were sprung upon her without an opportunity to prepare herself. One day, at a weekly assembly, she was forced to play when the school pianist was injured. Bronwyn believed that she was nowhere near the standard of the older and more experienced school pianist, who, to make matters worse, was sitting in the front row; her nerves got the better of her. Part of the way into the school song (which has a tricky left hand) Bronwyn stumbled over some notes and ‘lost the plot’. She could only manage to play the notes with her right hand, and she can remember her acute embarrassment to this day. When the school song was finished, the former student explains, Miss Barrett, aware of what had happened to

\(^{112}\) Elizabeth Alexander, *PN*, December 1988, p.3. Elizabeth was the first woman to become national president of the Australian Society of Accountants.

\(^{113}\) Elizabeth Alexander, *PN*, December 1988, p.3.
Bronwyn, stepped up to the microphone and praised Bronwyn’s courage in continuing under such adverse circumstances. The principal then turned the incident into an opportunity to encourage girls to persevere in life, regardless of misfortune. All Bronwyn can remember of this public support of her was feeling more certain than ever that she would ‘die of embarrassment’. But it did put an end to the matter, she recalls, and saved her from jibes from her peers. Bronwyn’s story concludes with her declaration that she made it through the second song without any trouble, ‘whatever that song was’.

Cultural tensions and teacher-student relationships

Anna Gouttman (Etenberg), a student from 1954 to 1957, believes that success at Mac.Rob was as much about becoming well educated and cultured as it was about going to university. While she was happy at Mac.Rob, Anna recalls an incident that occurred during her final year that disturbed her and continued to do so throughout her life. She tells the story of a young seventeen-year-old who had come to Australia from Eastern Europe in 1949, as had many others who attended Mac.Rob. Anna’s account offers an insight into what it was like to be a Jewish girl at Mac.Rob early in Daphne Barrett’s principalship—what she expected (or did not expect) from teachers and education, and how culturally different was her new school:

It happened in 1957 at the first meeting of our small Matriculation (now VCE) English Expression group. We eyed the door apprehensively, waiting anxiously to meet our teacher. She was new to the school but a somewhat fearsome reputation preceded her. She duly arrived and nothing about her appearance or action stilled our anxieties. Six feet tall, or more, ramrod of posture, she was dressed in a severe black suit, flat lace-up shoes and a small bowler hat. “My name is Miss Bowden”, she announced. “No one in my class has ever failed English Expression, and I am not going to allow anyone in this group to break my record”. Looking over the roll again she said, “Please stand, all those who don’t speak English at home”.

We stood, obediently, a sprinkling of us from eastern Europe, Asia and the Mediterranean. I seethed with rage and humiliation at this cruel singling out. The rest of the class sat silent in stunned disbelief. While we were well

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114 Bronwyn Hewitt (Raper), E-mail narrative, 29 November 2004.
familiar with taunts of “bloody foreigner” and “dirty reffo”, these were virtually unknown at Mac.Rob during that period of mass immigration when government policy promoted assimilation and we immigrants did our best to become good “New Australians”. For three years at the school we had always been included in everything as equals, measured only by the contribution we could make to school life. Now, suddenly, out of the blue, the rug of acceptance had been brutally yanked from under our feet and we had again become the foreigner, the stranger, the outsider. It was especially galling to me who had arrived in Australia at the age of nine, and by my seventeenth year considered myself to be fully competent in the English language. I was even on the committee of the school magazine. It also aroused anew memories of more chilling examples based on “difference” which were still all too recent for those of us who were Jewish refugees from Nazi-occupied Europe.

Fortunately, Miss Bowden’s intentions were not malevolent. She had merely wanted to know who was not a native English speaker and might need extra help. And, so, we forgave her. She proved to be a wonderful teacher. A cultured and world-wise woman, she ran a stimulating and challenging classroom and demanded much from us. Among the tasks she set was the memorising of lists and lists of Greek and Latin prefixes and suffixes. Armed with this wonderful tool, it became possible for me to decipher the meaning of unknown words in all the years to come. I don’t know if Miss Bowden’s record remains unbroken, but the memory of this incident, with all the accompanying rage and anguish, has flashed in and out of my consciousness for almost half a century. I have been told that a good way to lay such memories to rest is to write them down. And so I have.  

Anna’s story offers a particular glimpse into life at Mac.Rob in the late 1950s. At that time, a large proportion of students were Jewish immigrants, or the children of Jewish immigrants, and some of those former students recall experiencing some sensitivity and self-consciousness as they endeavoured to fit in. (There are women who argue that some Jewish girls never tried to assimilate, believing themselves to be intellectually superior to the rest of the students. Others reflect on how the presence of the Jewish contingent lifted

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115 Anna Gouttman (Etenberg), Letter to P. Parker, February 2006 and telephone discussion with P. Parker, March 2006. Record in author’s journal.
Mac.Rob’s cultural and intellectual life—Jewish girls were exciting with their maturity, boisterousness and different lifestyles—some were even atheists with Communist parents.) Anna was academically successful. She matriculated with first-class honours in English Literature and completed an arts degree at Melbourne University, majoring in psychology and history. She later became an interpreter at a Melbourne hospital.

What it meant to be a Mac.Rob girl from 1966 with Nina Carr’s appointment as principal is different in significant ways. Whereas a girl could enter different professions up to that time without having had to matriculate, with the rise of mass secondary education came increasing competition for fewer university places and jobs that increasingly required credentials such as Leaving and Matriculation certificates. From the 1960s, Australian society was undergoing massive social transformation and a general youth culture of rebellion grew in all cultural forms, including music, art and literature. A counter-culture developed on the university campuses and student protests echoed throughout the Western world, including Melbourne. Education began its own transformation, and identity among Mac.Rob girls seemed to reflect the clash of radicalism and conservatism as the nature and purposes of education itself were questioned and challenged, girls’ education in particular.

**Being a girl/Being a Mac.Rob girl 1966–2005**

_I was a strange mixture, controlled by my parents, but rebellious, not much of a mixer._

Agnes Nieuwenhuizen (Matrai), *PN* 1993

_Many girls had found love with men who had not gone as far in their education or careers as they had._

Margaret Safran, *Australian Jewish News* 1998

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116 Amirah Inglis (Gust) describes the complexities of being a Jewish girl at Mac.Rob in the 1940s. See Inglis, *An un-Australian Childhood*, pp. 127–32 and p. 150 in particular.

117 Agnes Nieuwenhuizen (Matrai), *PN*, November 1993, p. 8. Agnes trained as a teacher, and is well known as a writer and for her work in the field of children’s literature. Agnes currently works in this field at the State Library of Victoria. In 1993, her husband, John, was working full time in the Mac.Rob library.

I feel that socially we lacked the opportunity to mingle on a regular basis with the boys and perhaps missed out on some teenage fun.

Stella Limberis

Had I stayed at the private girls’ school, I highly doubt that I would ever have found the courage to become the person that I became at Mac.Rob.

Susanna Rosetti, 2005

The 1960s and 1970s were tumultuous times at Mac.Rob. The idea of the ‘Mac.Rob girl’, as she had evolved from generation to generation, was rejected as girls who were coming in from a wider demographic base began to test boundaries and challenge the status quo. In 1971 Sue Pavlovich, the editorial co-ordinator of student magazine Fruit, was in the headlines for spicing up the student magazine with swear words and discussion about girls’ drug use. In an article ‘Swear words in school magazines’, the Australian Financial Review headline declared, ‘Parents object, but heads say it’s OK’. It was a striking contrast to the 1948 article in the Australasian Post on the ideal Mac.Rob girl that suggested Mac.Rob needed to give more attention to deportment, manners, make-up and fashion. Sue Pavlovich stated, ‘For so long students have been repressed. One day, we just decided to break out of the old restrictions and produce a revolutionary school rag’. In one of the articles in the magazine, an unnamed student admitted to smoking marijuana and advised other girls to ‘try the experience’. The principal, Nina Carr, when questioned about the magazine, was adamant that the Fruit editorial team would ultimately act responsibly and she supported her students’ right to free speech: ‘By giving the students freedom to express their opinions on any controversial matter, I believe they will learn the force of the printed word, and, hopefully, a responsibility towards their readers. I don’t mind their articles on any topics, as long as they give both sides.’ This was a major break with the past at Mac.Rob, where once girls were disciplined for expressing their opinions publicly; yet in other ways the core values and the kind of girl promoted at Mac.Rob did not vary.

119 Stella Limberis, E-mail survey, September 2004.
120 Susanna Rosetti, E-mail survey, September 2004.
123 Fruit, 1971. MGHS Archive.
125 In 1941, three senior girls sent letters to Julia Flynn, Chief Inspector of Secondary Schools (requesting that she pass them on to the Director of Education) complaining that they could not hear their teachers because of the traffic noise along Kings Way. Flynn was furious and warned Mary Hutton, the principal, that she could face censure for her students’ rebellious actions. See Inglis, Amirah: An Un-Australian Childhood, p. 127.
Fitting in

When I came in at year ten, it was harder to integrate, because I was one of only two new girls. The others did not exclude us, however, and although at the time I was thinking how hard it was to be forced to integrate and make new friends, it was easy compared to making friends now.

Bianca Payne

As we have already heard, the majority of girls have come to Mac.Rob from state elementary and high schools, with only a minority coming from private and independent schools. Girls who moved from private schools sometimes found being a student at Mac.Rob preferable to being a girl at a private school. Stories of their experiences help to shed light on the differences between school systems and what it meant to be at Mac.Rob. Bianca Payne failed in her first attempt to qualify for entry to Mac.Rob, but she was successful the second time around, starting there in 1994. Bianca had spent her first three years of secondary schooling at Star of the Sea, a Catholic secondary college for girls in Gardenvale—Germaine Greer’s old school. According to Bianca, her parents resorted to bribing her with an overseas trip to pass the entrance examination to Mac.Rob because they believed that she would excel there. Bianca explained: ‘They told me about Mac.Rob’s reputation, and we had daughters of family friends who went there, and they were excessively smart and successful. I guess I fancied the idea of being in that rank’. Having spent her childhood in Germany, Bianca found the lure of a European trip and the thought of catching up with relations and friends highly motivating. She remembers the move to Mac.Rob from a private girls’ secondary college, where she had never been ‘cool’, as a happy experience. She discovered that at Mac.Rob there was no such thing as ‘the cool girl’, because ‘everybody spoke to each other, helped one another and contributed in class, confident that they would not be teased’. This is Bianca’s image of the Mac.Rob girl retrospectively—she was equal to everybody else, and judged only on academic merit, rather than ‘on what car our Daddy drives’.

Bianca loved Mac.Rob. She loved the idea of Mac.Rob and her experiences there. She acknowledges that there ‘were some pretty cruel teachers there’ and that ‘some girls could

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127 Bianca Payne, E-mail narrative, 30 September 2004.
128 Bianca Payne, E-mail narrative, 30 September 2004.
129 Bianca Payne, E-mail narrative, 30 September 2004.
130 Bianca Payne, E-mail narrative, 30 September 2004.
easily outwit some teachers’, but she remembers many more teachers who were outstanding: high achieving academics and hard markers who ‘did not let us slip through the system’. To Bianca, the Mac.Rob girl is confident at every age, although that takes many forms: ‘We are different because we have the best teachers, an age-old pride in our reputation, and ambition’. Bianca reveals some frustration with herself for not following the traditional pathway to university after completing her VCE. Perhaps needing to discover her own interests and strengths away from family and school, she tried her hand at different professions, in fashion, business and dentistry. Along with her formal qualification in dentistry, she has amassed a wealth of experience in other areas. As a young woman who presently divides her time between Paris, London and Munich, Bianca asserts that Mac.Rob ‘always encouraged us to think for ourselves’. She came out of Mac.Rob knowing that ‘everything in life could be mine...the very mentality which makes a Mac.Rob girl’. 

Susanna Rosetti contrasts the hierarchical structure of her former Catholic secondary school where, in her experience, girls were defined according to their popularity, with what was to her a far more egalitarian environment at Mac.Rob. ‘Coming to Mac.Rob [in 1995] was so refreshing’, Susanna explains: ‘I felt like everyone was equal’. Moving from a Catholic girls’ secondary college culture into Mac.Rob in the 1990s altered significantly Susanna’s level of self-confidence and her worldview. In her previous school setting she had observed a distinct hierarchy that defined and ranked girls according to popularity and supported snobbishness and “bitchiness”. She was not happy there. Susanna attributes the sense of equality she experienced at Mac.Rob to the selection process primarily, because sitting for a competitive examination suggests to her that those who are successful at gaining entry have passed the same test and so have nothing to prove to one another other. The girls could always ‘just be themselves’. According to Susanna, the entrance examination favoured girls with some maturity and this, in turn, helped to create a comfortable environment where almost all were able to grow and express themselves without fear of being ostracised by their peer group. Susanna’s story suggests that she became a very different girl at Mac.Rob. Mac.Rob’s lower school fees meant that her parents could afford private music

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131 Bianca Payne, E-mail narrative, 30 September 2004.
133 Susanna Rosetti, E-mail narrative, September 2004.
134 Susanna Rosetti, September 2004.
135 Although Victorian state high schools are permitted to charge a basic school fee to cover costs of curriculum delivery, it is a voluntary fee and parents cannot be forced to pay. At Mac.Rob the fee is around $1000 (still one of the highest in the state school system) and it is understood, I am told in doing my research for this history, that parents commit to their contribution as part of the entry process. Three parents admitted that they were delighted to pay such a low fee for the privilege of a
tuition and Susanna was able to realise a long-held secret desire to play a musical instrument well. She was so successful at mastering the trumpet, she notes, that she ended up playing in five different musical groups at school and was still able to cope with the demands of the academic curriculum. Her confidence soared, she believes, mainly because she felt it was safe to have a go:

The house chorals director liked me so much that she wrote the following year’s play with me in mind for the main part, although she had never before heard me sing. I played Satan, sang my first solo, and shocked everyone with my loud and arrogant performance, because I’m actually a quiet and conscientious student.¹³⁶

As Susanna was leaving, Victoria Truhn arrived at Mac.Rob, also from a private school. At Mac.Rob, Victoria explains, she discovered that it was not the end of the world if a girl did not have a boyfriend: ‘At my former school all that mattered was that a girl was attached’.¹³⁷ Nevertheless, as a Mac.Rob girl, Victoria did not see herself as different from other girls just because she went to Mac.Rob. She does, however, find herself to be more independent and more self-disciplined, something she directly attributes to being a Mac.Rob girl. ‘Until this day’, she divulges, ‘I keep on wondering what would have happened if I had stayed at my old school. Would I have received so many opportunities and where would my life be heading now? In some ways I am indebted to my parents for pushing me to get into Mac.Rob’:

In many ways, the Mac.Rob girl gets the best of both worlds, the quality of a private school education, but with the ethos and democratic values of a public [state] school. The Mac.Rob girl is often a high achiever over many fields: academically gifted, musically talented, good at sport, drama, debating and art. Mac.Rob seems to be good at turning out “accomplished” young ladies, as Jane Austen might say.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Susanna Rosetti, September 2004. Susanna spent two years training to be an officer in the Royal Australian Navy but left because she found the lifestyle unappealing and unsatisfying.
¹³⁷ Victoria Truhn, E-mail survey, October 2004.
¹³⁸ Victoria Truhn, E-mail survey, October 2004.
Even those who were more ambivalent about their experience at the time subsequently see the school in a positive light. Stella Limberis considers herself to have been an average student, and a girl who did not feel one hundred percent comfortable at Mac.Rob. Stella came to Mac.Rob via the central school pathway in the 1980s, on the advice of her grade six teacher, who had attended Mac.Rob herself. Recommendation from the central school principal at that time was usually enough to guarantee entry without having to sit an entrance examination, an issue former principals Gwen Bowles and Gabrielle Blood took up, as was noted in the previous chapter. According to Stella, Mac.Rob girls in her era had the reputation of being ‘squares’ who thought only about school work and were not much fun. ‘I heard the term “Mac.dogs” a few times, I think from Melbourne High boys’, she reflects. ‘We were seen as snobs!’ Stella remembers the physical aspect of the school—its dark hallways in particular. Linking the physical structures of the schools with memories of her experiences there, Stella remembers the ‘rigid structure of a school in which girls were kept on the straight and narrow’. It was all very serious at Mac.Rob. ‘However’, she adds surprisingly, ‘for this very reason I would like to send my daughter to Mac.Rob one day’.139

Lili Wilkinson was a happy, but ‘not particularly challenged’ student at Northcote High School before moving to Mac.Rob in the 1980s. The thought of being in a school with hundreds of other high-achieving girls sounded great, according to Lili, so she sat the entrance examination and was successful. To Lili, independence is the defining quality of the Mac.Rob girl when she contrasts her schooling experience with that of other children with whom she grew up. Of the ten or so of her childhood friends, Lili notes, she was the only one to attend a public (state) school and the only one to go through to university.140

Thao Huynh had already been to two secondary schools before gaining entry to Mac.Rob in 1998. So determined was she to get in, she sat the entrance examination twice—not an uncommon experience. For Thao, the Mac.Rob girl could excel in the ‘vibrant culture of excellence’ into which the girls came. She believes that the Mac.Rob girl prizes academic achievement: she can have ambition and can thrive in an environment that rewards excellence and unashamed academic drive.141 Tzong Ping Vigh agrees. She came to Mac.Rob from University High School in 2002. For her, being a Mac.Rob girl was mainly about being able to excel academically in an environment where academic achievement was

139 Stella Limberis, E-mail survey, September 2004.
140 Lili Wilkinson, E-mail survey, September 2004.
141 Thao Huynh, E-mail survey, October 2004. Thao is currently in her final year of optometry at the University of Melbourne. She believes very strongly in the importance of selective state high schools for those who wish take that pathway.
a common purpose. According to Tzong Ping, there was a mutual understanding among the students and staff that academic excellence was why girls came to Mac.Rob; it was what the school was about. At her former high school, she had found that academically inclined students were disadvantaged because of the amount of time wasted by teachers trying to get students to pay attention. At Mac.Rob she found that students wanted to learn, just like she did. The Mac.Rob girl, then, is generally free from constraints that would otherwise impede her progress towards achieving her potential—if that is what she wants—in a like-minded community.

Success and failure in defining the Mac.Rob girl

The overall sense was that of a successful group of girls, breaking stereotypes and, if not changing the world, at least contributing to it.

Margaret Safran

Mac.Rob girls are young women who are free to fully express ourselves, to be ourselves and to be proud of ourselves. At Mac.Rob we don’t have to hide our achievements, our backgrounds or our personalities.

Mac.Rob girls are not run-of-the-mill girls.

Focus group (history committee), 2003

A woman’s memory of her schooling experience can confirm or deny what she thought that school was all about at the time she was there. Her subsequent experience after leaving school can create a disjunction between what she thought the school was about and how her life turned out. One student from the 1950s wrote to her former principal, Daphne Barrett, in 1972, reflecting with some regret on her youth and her subsequent life path. ‘It would be pleasant to have cut-a-dash somewhere in the world as quite a number of my schoolmates

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142 Tzong Ping Vigh, E-mail survey, September 2004.
143 This point was strongly reinforced by a range of speakers (students and staff) at the annual school speech night 2006.
144 Margaret Safran, ‘Changing Careers the Norm for MacRob’s Class of ’88’, p. 13.
146 Focus group of the school history committee, 2003. Record in P. Parker’s journal.
have’, she wrote.\textsuperscript{147} This woman genuinely regretted that she did not “become someone” like many of the Mac.Rob girls who she presumes ‘are spread out across the globe’.\textsuperscript{148} In spite of pervasive beliefs that the majority of Mac.Rob girls went off to university and carved out careers, took up leadership roles and made important contributions to society, it is the case that not every girl was able to go to university,\textsuperscript{149} and many did not even aspire to a higher education, particularly not until the 1970s when the federal Labor government made university education free. For most girls, schooling was for work, and being at Mac.Rob improved their employment prospects considerably. The relationship many now draw between being a Mac.Rob girl and success in life is, perhaps, mostly a retrospective judgement, and one that is more heavily influenced by the school’s increasing reputation for academic success and excellence. That said, Mac.Rob consistently produced young women who gained scholarships to study for teaching and nursing and university degrees, and increased the employment prospects of those who did not aspire to, or were unable to pursue, further education and professional training.

Clare Mullen, a student in the mid-1980s, believes that she discovered what it meant to be a Mac.Rob girl retrospectively—when she attended a reunion in 2004. Success in Clare’s experience was connected to higher degrees at university:

My definition of a Mac.Rob girl comes from what I found at a 20-year reunion. Nearly all the girls in the room with whom I spoke had completed a higher degree at university, a Masters or a PhD, which I found quite impressive. Some had kids, some did not. Most were pretty content with their lot in life.\textsuperscript{150}

Caroline Roberts (Hunting), a student in the late 1980s, was fourteen years old when she decided that she wanted to be a Mac.Rob success story.\textsuperscript{151} What did it mean to Caroline to be a success? Success was going to the right high school, to the right university, getting the

\textsuperscript{147} Letter to Daphne Barrett, 28 September 1972, Unit 14, MGHS Archives.
\textsuperscript{148} Letter to Daphne Barrett, 28 September 1972.
\textsuperscript{149} The school enrolment registers show that up to that time the majority of students left after their intermediate or leaving year to enter clerical work, and teaching and nursing if they could get bursaries.
\textsuperscript{150} Clare Mullen, E-mail narrative, 20 October 2004. Mac.Rob reunions, held each year, are generally well attended, with up to twenty percent of a year level returning to the school to meet former students and staff.
\textsuperscript{151} Caroline Roberts (Hunting), ‘Wonder Woman’, \textit{Athene}, 2003, p. 41.
right degree, finding employment in the right corporation and achieving the right postgraduate degree. Yet, according to Caroline, fourteen years after leaving Mac.Rob:

I wonder if I was a little ill-informed when I made this decision. Is it possible that there is more to life than the Mac.Rob way? I’m feeling something suspiciously close to guilt for believing that I am almost ready to put that career on hold...cut out of the corporate thing for a while, have a couple of kids, perhaps later on, return to the work force part time...give other things in my life more priority. Surely there is more to life than the all too frustrating task of attempting to crash through that ever-present glass ceiling?

Caroline was questioning her life 14 years down the track, wondering what her old school had taught her about life values and how career selection might impact on a girl’s personal life. ‘Hell bent on breaking with traditional roles and producing perfect power women, it seems as if family priorities and other paths were overlooked...or ignored,’ she reflected. Caroline drew on social trends statistics from the Australian Bureau of Statistics to highlight the relationship between highly educated women delaying childbirth and career prioritisation. These showed that, in 1996, ‘the highest proportion of childless women was among those with a bachelor degree or higher (20%), compared with women with no post-school qualifications (9%)’. Caroline now wondered about the role of the school to ‘provide advice on the “right” balance between career and personal life’. She wished that she had been told that considering motherhood in the future was an ‘acceptable life strategy’, a valid option for successful women. ‘Don’t get me wrong’, she cautioned as she attempted to reconcile the idea and experience of success with her concern for what she was missing:

I greatly appreciate the encouragement I received whilst at Mac.Rob—to change the world, to reach my academic potential, to believe that I was as good as the next person (if not better). But I grieve the missing piece in all of this. Occasionally through the years, it would have been wise, surely, to hear

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152 Caroline Roberts (Hunting), ‘Wonder Woman’.
153 Caroline Roberts (Hunting), ‘Wonder Woman’.
154 Caroline Roberts (Hunting), ‘Wonder Woman’.
that we can be a valuable contributor to society, regardless of our “occupation”.\textsuperscript{156}

Kirsten Trengove regards her life after Mac.Rob as one of going ‘from adventure to adventure’. Kirsten loved her time at Mac.Rob, although she admits she had no desire to be like any of her teachers. She recalls her aspirations as a soon-to-be school leaver in 1987:

As a student, I always intended to go on to university. I had a teenage fantasy where I saw myself grown up, leading a professional, independent, self-sufficient and very social life. The image was of myself in my own flat…after a busy and fulfilling day of work, reading (a professional journal!), drinking wine and smoking a cigarette. It epitomised a satisfying life, and out of the picture and not too far away was a lover.\textsuperscript{157}

At the age of twenty-six, Kirsten was independent and happily working in a demanding, challenging job, with the poverty of her student days and early working life behind her. She realised she was living her fantasy. ‘That was nearly ten years ago,’ she observed, ‘and it seems that life continues to move from adventure to adventure’. Kirsten recently married:

In this relationship I learned that I don’t need to fight for the things I felt I needed to fight for. I already had them. I don’t always have them in other relationships, such as work for instance, but I am not so aggressive about how I try to get them. I learnt a certain resilience when I was at Mac.Rob; education is not so much about what school you went to, but other fundamental people in your life too.\textsuperscript{158}

‘Mac.Rob does not always suit every girl’

There were a handful of students that didn’t like Mac.Rob and went back to their old school. But having the option is important.

Susanna Rosetti\textsuperscript{159}

\textsuperscript{156} Caroline Roberts (Hunting), ‘Wonder Woman’.
\textsuperscript{157} Kirsten Trengove, E-mail narrative, 10 July 2004.
\textsuperscript{158} Kirsten Trengove, E-mail narrative, 10 July 2004.
\textsuperscript{159} Susanna Rosetti, E-mail survey, September 2004.
There is a refrain that has been repeated by a number of people throughout this research project: Mac.Rob does not always suit every girl. It is, on occasion, as if I, as the researcher, am being warned, even inoculated against criticism of the school. But it is also a statement implying specialness. Not being suited to Mac.Rob can be interpreted in different ways and it became an important theme in this history because it generated interesting questions about the Mac.Rob girl herself in relation to the school’s mission and ethos. Who might Mac.Rob not suit and why? What does this say about the girls who are suited to Mac.Rob? Having attended three annual speech nights and watched former students stand tall and proudly sing the school songs, often with tears rolling down their faces, I wondered what sentiment and experience lies behind the declaration ‘I am a Mac.Rob girl’. Former students have revealed that they can encounter Mac.Rob ‘old girls’ in unexpected ways. The story in chapter three of two former students meeting in the London Underground during peak hour one Friday evening is a powerful example. There are similar stories that illustrate how strongly former students identify with their old school, not just because they had a motto drummed into them but because of the centrality, even comfort, of this legacy of schooling in their lives beyond school. And yet, some former students would feel quite embarrassed at Ruth’s story because of its sentimentality and because school traditions have different meanings for them.

Not every former Mac.Rob student identifies with her old school in the way Ruth does. Some girls came to Mac.Rob and found that the school did not suit them or, alternatively, that they did not suit the school. The oral histories, e-mail narratives, questionnaires, memoirs, autobiographies and biographies gathered for this history reveal that there are many differences among the girls who attended the school. There were radical girls, for example, who found the school’s ethos and practices a constant challenge, perhaps because they made no sense to them as young girls, or because they wanted to question and test the status quo. There have been clever girls and plodders, academic and studious girls, and girls who were less serious and ambitious and less inclined to forego romance and vibrant social lives as adolescents. There have been girls from very poor families, girls from wealthy families, single-parent families, religious and non-religious families. They are all part of the school’s history and their stories are all important in understanding what it means to be a Mac.Rob girl.

Chloe Patton, currently a full-time PhD scholar at RMIT University, attended Mac.Rob for three years in the early 1990s. But she left Mac.Rob to complete her VCE at another state high school. Mac.Rob’s legacies are mixed for Chloe. Being there gave her confidence as a young woman, a deeply valued outcome, but it also left her with disappointments when her
own goals and values clashed with those she experienced at Mac.Rob. Why did Chloe go to Mac.Rob in the first place? She was, she concedes, aware that being at Mac.Rob was virtually a ticket to a first-choice university course, an appealing reason. Her mother had also been a student at Mac.Rob and Chloe could recall her lively and engaging stories of mini-skirts and multiculturalism and having Germaine Greer on the reading list. What Chloe found particularly appealing was the idea that Mac.Rob girls who desired to express their creativity were not looked down on, whereas, in a different state high school setting, ‘a girl risked being devalued for wanting to study sissy stuff like the creative arts’. There were early warning bells, according to Chloe, when her year eight teacher advised her to sit the entrance examination, pointing out that she should select ‘subjects that would not stuff up her future’—the right choices being mathematics and science. ‘But,’ she adds, ‘a thirteen-year-old girl is hardly in the position to be thinking about life beyond school’. She had no ambitions at that time, she explains, yet subject choices were already imposing pressure on her before she had an idea what she wanted to be.

In some ways, Mac.Rob was a culture shock for Chloe, just as it had been for Lois Bryson (Hobson) 30–40 years earlier. In contrast to her previous state high school Mac.Rob reminded Chloe more of a private school with its emphasis on externals such as uniform regulations—regulations that failed to make sense to her as a young girl who valued common sense. Chloe felt that Mac.Rob’s power and vigilance should not extend beyond the school gates, that girls should feel free to remove their blazers in hot weather, for example. The problem, according to the former student, was that the rules narrowly specified permissible combinations of each uniform item. A girl could not go into the city wearing her skirt, shirt, tie and jumper, for instance; she had to wear her blazer to and from school or risk receiving a detention. It made no sense to Chloe that such strictness was so determinedly policed and enforced, and, in her view, it left no room for the unexpected, and for the girl to use her own initiative. Even detentions and punishments puzzled her, for she felt that they were more about keeping the school trophies polished than understanding a clash between school and individual student values.

Not all girls were compliant about rules in Chloe’s experience. There was a time, she recalls, when girls decided to test authority by organising a petition against the rigid uniform

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160 Interview with Chloe Patton, 23 March 2005.
161 Interview with Chloe Patton.
162 Interview with Chloe Patton.
163 Interview with Chloe Patton. Chloe’s tale of having to polish school trophies is retold in Chapter Four.
regulations. Word of this reached one teacher’s ear and her response was to remind the girls that ‘Mac.Rob is not for everybody’. The meaning of this ‘warning’ was left to the girls’ own interpretations, according to Chloe, but, she continues, ‘the sinister tones made them think about the possibility that a girl’s place at Mac.Rob might be in jeopardy if she was not being the right kind of girl’.164 In Chloe’s memory, the image of the young lady was a central feature of being a Mac.Rob girl, whereas at her previous school, and the school to which she moved for her final year, the emphasis was on other things. In retrospect, Chloe believes that messages about being young ladies tended to obscure other aspects of being a school girl. Chloe could recall former principal Nina Carr regularly addressing the girls at weekly assemblies, reminding them of the importance of being the right kind of girl, the girl who would not let the school down. How, then, might a modern girl let the school down? In Chloe’s experience it included external behaviours such as eating in public, not wearing the school uniform correctly, behaving inappropriately on public transport and being noisy in public spaces.

This emphasis on the inculcation of habits that ensured appropriate behaviour, demeanour and appearance, was, in Chloe’s view, stifling.165 A further contradiction Chloe notes is that, in her experience, girls who were academically brilliant were treated differently from other girls. Chloe sensed that bad behaviour on their part was tolerated more than in less exceptional girls, an interesting observation since a number of Mac.Rob principals have argued that Mac.Rob welcomes girls who do not fit in at other schools. Historically, certain types of behaviour have been tolerated as long as the school’s reputation was not jeopardised.166

Chloe’s story suggests that the image Mac.Rob projected in her day, particularly through its strict rules, came at a cost to some girls because Mac.Rob, though a state high school, oversubscribed to particular kinds of behaviours in order to meet the high expectations generated by parents, the school community, other schools and the wider public. Chloe’s experience suggests that Mac.Rob offers a great deal to those receptive to its ethos and traditions, and that, perhaps, is one reason why it does not always suit every girl. Mac.Rob has a formula for doing well, argues Chloe and ‘that is why girls choose to be there’. In Chloe’s experience, academic success was the priority, and it was not the norm for girls in

164 Interview with Chloe Patton, 23 March 2005.
165 Interview with Chloe Patton, 23 March 2005.
166 See interviews with Gwen Bowles and Gabrielle Blood, for example.
her day to want something different.\textsuperscript{167} Chloe does attribute to Mac.Rob the ability to empower women, and she relates an experience she had at university to illustrate this. During a tutorial, a male student called her a “femmo Nazi” when she told him what she thought of his ‘condescending behaviour and attitude in class’. This tough, conservative young man was unable to cope with Chloe’s blunt and direct way of expressing herself, something that Chloe considers a normal part of being a Mac.Rob girl: ‘a girl who becomes a no-nonsense woman taking her place in the world’.\textsuperscript{168}

By year 11, Chloe found herself bored and hating school. The arts subjects she wanted to study were dropped owing to lack of numbers, and so concerned were her teachers with Chloe’s decision to change her subjects that her mother was called in. According to Chloe, the teacher who met her mother was shocked when Mrs Patton refused to intervene, confirming, rather, that she was confident that her daughter was capable of making her own decisions. Perhaps the teacher was unable to handle Chloe’s independence, ultimately seeing her as a girl who was taking up a space that another, more receptive girl could have had. Chloe is convinced that Mac.Rob did give her great self-confidence, which she felt would not have been nurtured to the same degree in a different environment. ‘In a way it [Mac.Rob] gave girls authority to be aggressive, to say what they wanted’, she reflected in 2005. The single-sex character of the school enhanced the development of a strong sense of self-identity, as girls did not have to compete with boys, nor be distracted in the many ways that can happen in a co-educational school.\textsuperscript{169}

Where Chloe Patton found fulfilment apart from Mac.Rob, Kirsten Trengove found that Mac.Rob and she suited each other perfectly. According to Kirsten, she had been a ‘kid on the outer’ prior to coming to Mac.Rob. ‘I felt a bit too smart, a bit too daggy’, she explained.\textsuperscript{170} Part of the problem for her was cultural difference, which made her feel isolated, shut out of the world of her peers, although she did have wonderful memories of sharing family meals with a close school friend.\textsuperscript{171} Ultimately, however, ‘[The] parents didn’t really know what to make of their kids mixing with the Anglo girl. I felt shut out by their shared cultural experience. Why didn’t I go to communion? Why didn’t I have a name day? Why didn’t I go to Italian classes on Saturdays instead of playing tennis?’ Coming to Mac.Rob, which claims some forty-five different languages in a culturally diverse student

\textsuperscript{167} Interview with Chloe Patton.
\textsuperscript{168} Interview with Chloe Patton.
\textsuperscript{169} Interview with Chloe Patton.
\textsuperscript{170} Kirsten Trengove, E-mail narrative, 10 July 2004.
\textsuperscript{171} Kirsten Trengove, E-mail narrative, 10 July 2004.
population, Kirsten felt at home; she did not feel different.\(^{172}\) How was this so? According to Kirsten, differences that had meaning away from Mac.Rob did not exist at Mac.Rob.

At Mac.Rob everyone was smart. Everyone knew how to read aloud without stumbling. I didn’t stand out for being different. And I loved the closeness I shared with girls who became my friends. Because we lived so far away from each other, it made sense to stay overnight on the weekends, and so we spent time together and I learned how other families lived and loved.\(^{173}\)

Kirsten is a twin, whose sister attended a different high school, married at the age of twenty and ‘has three beautiful children’. Kirsten married much later in life, some twenty years after leaving school. In doing so, she became a stepmother and ‘will probably not have children’. She is abundantly happy.\(^{174}\)

**There is no single explanation or meaning of being a Mac.Rob girl**

This chapter has presented brief snapshots of a range of women who attended Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School between 1905 and 2005. From these perspectives (strongly mediated by memories of school experiences and life beyond school), it is evident that there is no single explanation or meaning about being a girl at this school, whatever its name, whatever its location. There is, however, an idea, a concept about what it has meant to be a girl at this school over a century—there are values, desires and experience that are discernible in every era. There is also a strong sense of the elders passing along the wisdom (as received historically and experienced themselves), the mythology, of what a Mac.Rob girl is and should be. In its mission statement in the school charter, Mac.Rob in the twenty-first century set out to describe the Mac.Rob girl. In doing so, it gave each girl, past and present, a model, something to identify with as well as measure herself against. Some former and current students have narrow measures of success, defining it in relation to the TER score and university placement, a necessary definition in a cut-throat education market. School captain in 2004, Sally Renouf agrees, arguing that ‘too much pressure was put on the girls at Mac.Rob to achieve and go off and study medicine and law, and so on. There was no room for indecision or difference where a girl might not actually know what it is she wants

\(^{172}\) Kirsten Trengove, E-mail narrative, 10 July 2004.
\(^{173}\) Kirsten Trengove, E-mail narrative, 10 July 2004.
\(^{174}\) Kirsten Trengove, E-mail narrative, 10 July 2004.
to do at the age of seventeen or eighteen. Some students have identified themselves more closely with the school’s own historical development, celebrating where they are and how they have reached that point, through adversity and through struggling to achieve success in the way that is important to them. There are broader definitions of success too, where life experience beyond school is a guiding principle for some and a measure for others of the success of the ideal image they had as Mac.Rob girls.

There is an element of mystery about the Mac.Rob girl and how she defines and sees herself. The idealised version against which some girls (and some teachers and parents) contrast their own ideas and experience can both confirm and refute a particular sense of identity. For some, it doesn’t matter—they don’t think about what it means to be a Mac.Rob girl. They have been more focused on getting to Mac.Rob and making it through. There are tensions between present conceptualisations of what it means to be a Mac.Rob girl and historical conceptualisations, some of which are the stuff of myth and tradition. With competition so fierce for entry to Mac.Rob in the twenty-first century, there are those who feel that the ideal Mac.Rob girl is under threat, with some present-day girls and parents regarding Mac.Rob simply as a ticket to university.

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175 Conversation with P. Parker, November 2004. Record in author’s journal.
Conclusion

It is a preposterously ambitious enterprise, trying to make whole people, whole situations, whole other ways of being out of the dusty fragments left after real lives end. But that is what the best historians set out to do. Their core narrative is always their struggle with recalcitrant, evasive sources. As they interrogate those sources before our eyes, we have a fleeting sense of what it would have been like to have lived a different life, in a different place, in a different time.¹

The first chapter of this history charted my own unfolding consciousness and the intersections of my own subjectivities as I tried to work out not just how to write this history of Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School, but how it might contribute to the study of history more broadly. My first visit to the State Library of Victoria to examine its collection of school histories soon after the project began was a pivotal point from a theoretical perspective. While there I enlisted the assistance of a librarian to help me locate repositories of communications that would have passed between the various players in the evolution and growth of state secondary education in Victoria. When acquainted with the nature of my research project the librarian told me with some surprise that a definitive history of state secondary education in Victoria had already been written. “You don’t want to waste your time on something that has already been done now, do you?” he gently queried. This compelling advice signalled just how complex history could be, particularly in the context of on-going controversies and debates about the purposes and practices of history, and of education. With constant calls for historians to maintain objectivity in writing about the past and for historians to ‘nail their colours to the mast’² in the histories they write, my challenge was to figure out the substance of my own colours as well as my own questions in relation to this history. As I collected women’s narratives during 2002 and 2003, I found my own subjectivities and past butting up against, often colliding with, those narratives of lives as school girls—memories and interpretations of events, places, people, experiences, times, situations, emotions, thoughts, puzzles and ideas.³ I realised that I could not write this history

¹ Inga Clendinnen, ‘Pardon, your ethics are showing’, Age, 30 September 2006, A2, p. 16.
² Clendinnen, p. 16.
³ According to Kathleen Weiler, ‘Subjectivity … implies the struggle and contest over identity, the ways in which the selves are unstable, shifting, constructed through both dominant conceptions and resistance to those conceptions, and suggests the incomplete and sometimes contradictory quality of our lives both in the present and as we construct our lives through memory’. Kathleen Weiler, ‘Reflections on writing a history of women teachers’, in Kathleen Weiler & Sue Middleton (eds), 1999, Telling Women’s Lives: Narrative Inquiries into the History of Women’s Education, Open
unless, somehow, I could ‘slip out of my own skin’, to appreciate and grasp the meaning and historical significance of what they were telling me. Getting out of one’s skin may appear a somewhat simplistic metaphor, but it is a useful guide for the historian’s overall responsibility and task, and a practical reminder to steer clear of making assumptions in writing about the past.

Eventually, I decided that the women who attended this school were the main subjects of the school history. It was they who were being educated, they who were part of the reasons the school first came into existence (albeit as gendered subjects in society that prioritised and valued the education of boys over that of girls), and continued to exist—although never without difficulty. It was their stories and their memories of the rich experience of being educated that contributed so much rich context for the school history. Mindful of R.J.W. Selleck and others’ contention that the subjects of schools—the students—are often absent from school histories, or are present ‘merely as a background against which monarchs and their retinue can parade’, the narratives I received in their diverse forms suggested that focusing on the experience of being a girl at this particular school could provide important insights into, and encounters with, many of the discourses and bureaucratic and social structures that influenced public and private lives. The primary purpose of this school history, then, was to offer an historical understanding of what it was like, and meant, to be a girl at Mac.Rob from 1905. As education does not occur in a vacuum, historical understanding relies on building a rich contextual background—context, as some of the best historians have argued time and time again, is everything in writing about the past. In the case of this history, the context in which schooling occurred and was experienced includes the political, social, economic, cultural and religious influences that produced, inspired, organised or mediated this educational institution over a century.

The questions that arose throughout the process of researching and writing this history reflect the diversity of opinion and perspectives about the purposes of education and how girls and boys should be educated, and there was no shortage of viewpoints on these issues. In the end, I decided to organise the school history thematically—as a narrative of the establishment and

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University Press, Buckingham, p. 46. Michael Frisch argues that memory—the personal, historical, individual and generational memory—is the true object of oral history. He asks, ‘What happens to experience on the way to becoming memory? What happens to experience on the way to becoming history? These questions were important ones to keep in mind when distilling the information received in the personal narratives. See Michael Frisch, ‘Oral History and Hard Times’, Robert Perks & Alistair Thomson (eds), 1998, The Oral History Reader, Routledge, London.

The evolution of an educational institution (Mac.Rob) and a narrative of memories of being there—somewhat like a conversation between four generations of Mac.Rob women, the education bureaucracy and the social world. The idea of education, such contested terrain since 1905 in particular, is a continuous theme throughout this history because it affected girls’ educational opportunities and shaped theories and practices concerning the education of girls, and their roles within society more broadly.

Drawing conclusions

1. The meaning of Mac.Rob

Mac.Rob had girls from all walks of life and they are generally confident, articulate and intelligent. That said, these are the only girls who have a positive Mac.Rob experience – those who really want to be there. Mac.Rob is all about getting an education. If there are other things going on in your life that may prevent you from focusing on your studies, Mac.Rob is not always the easiest place to exist in.5

What can be drawn from this version of Mac.Rob’s past? First, women’s own stories suggest that there was no homogeneity of experience, no grand narrative or single explanation of why they were there, what it was like and what it meant to be at Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School. Mac.Rob was indeed emancipatory for many girls—emancipatory from negative expectations and comparisons (of peer groups and, sometimes, teachers) in other school environments for one thing. At Mac.Rob, strategies used in previous educational settings, such as clowning around or underachieving to avoid negative labels (‘brain’ and ‘nerd’ are two examples of milder labels), where behaviour and values might be more influenced by non-academic activities, were not required.6 Mac.Rob, for many former students, meant that a girl could be herself, free to be enthusiastic about a science experiment, a poem, a work of art, music, a mathematical problem or a discussion about Freud instead of the Beatles, Big Brother or Australian Idol. These women describe how they felt free to thrive intellectually at Mac.Rob without having to make compromises to fit in with the peer group. While there are also stories of failure to fit in, with girls coming into Mac.Rob and finding its culture and ethos intimidating and out of their realm of comfort, Mac.Rob has welcomed girls who did

5 Jessica Doyle, E-mail survey, October 2004.
6 Nevertheless, former students who completed the commercial course at Mac.Rob tend to say that they felt inferior to, and were treated differently from, girls in the professional, academic classes. This has not been an issue since commercial classes were discontinued in the mid 1970s.
not fit into their previous schools. These girls might have been bored and in need of intellectual stimulation—girls who were regarded as ‘behaviour problems’ in other settings. At Mac.Rob, however, behavioural idiosyncrasies could be managed as long as the student did not clash too severely with its ethos and culture. Mac.Rob did not always suit every girl, and every girl did not always suit Mac.Rob.

Mac.Rob also offered freedom in a different sense. For many, it offered freedom during the school day from the pain and anguish of difficult private worlds. It offered freedom from working-class origins that worked against a girl’s potential (and her own awareness of her potential), her dreams of academic success and life success, better employment prospects and choices, or a university education if she desired one. Mac.Rob opened up new worlds to many of its students. It introduced them to experiences of higher culture and it often revealed possibilities for futures that probably would not have presented themselves if they had attended another school. This was the case particularly with the advent of mass secondary schooling in the post-war decades and the extension of the school leaving age. Former students described how they were not socially, culturally and politically aware until they went to Mac.Rob. It was there, they argue, that they discovered a ‘whole new world’—new people, cultures, beliefs, attitudes, values, languages and art—a world often very different from their private worlds. For others, Mac.Rob was familiar territory socially, culturally and intellectually. They felt at home there, both their upbringing and aspirations confirmed and affirmed in Mac.Rob’s customs and traditions. Many former students identify positively with their old school’s ethos and values, or particular aspects of them, but, as is the case at Mac.Rob with its multiplicity of experiences and perspectives, the opposite is also true—there are degrees of identification. One former student publicly defined herself in opposition to Mac.Rob, arguing that at her old school she discovered what she did not want to be.7 Her memory of her schooling experiences positions that time as something she had to endure in a setting that was little different from a private school with its emphasis on middle class externals and tradition.

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2. Identity

There seems to exist an attitude out there that, in order to achieve a fabulous education, followed by certain success, you must attend an excessively expensive private school. This constantly vexes me. In fact, when I was attending Mac.Rob, we were fourth from the top of high achieving schools. We were fiercely competitive to win the title of best school of the year, and, I believe, they eventually did win. This was achieved despite under-funding. We were being taught in portable classrooms and our sports hall had rats living in it and was a seriously unstable structure. Many of us did constantly complain. We needed better classrooms and perhaps we could have achieved much more with, for instance, a better library—our library was so ridiculous.  

At Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School there has existed a complex web of discourses within which Mac.Rob women have positioned themselves, or have been positioned—as working class, as middle class, as sporty, bookish, shy or confident, ordinary, gifted, conservative, radical, naïve, sophisticated, tough, and sometimes, physically disabled. They have not always seen themselves as gendered beings either, such consciousness tending to come retrospectively for some. Mac.Rob women often say that as high school students they thought of themselves as persons concerned with their own development, issues and lives as well as accepting that they were young women being educated in a privileged setting. For many, their very education was a privilege itself, something that principals and headmistresses constantly reiterated.

Mac.Rob as a cultural landscape provided fertile ground for the growth of girls’ identities, although not all girls always understood or wanted what it offered. While Mac.Rob was a good place to be while a girl decided what she wanted to do with her life, it was often the case that there was no obvious choice, if indeed she imagined something other than marriage and motherhood. A minority did. The evidence suggests that these women defined themselves according to their experience of life (both at school and after), according to class concerns, economic circumstances and, for some, ethnicity. There are also those who defined themselves according to work. Most of those who attended Mac.Rob did so with the expectation that they would join the workforce. Mary Hutton, principal between 1934 and 1948, knew this, and, in her regular reports, reminded her school community that 99 per cent of Mac.Rob students would be looking for employment. She emphasised that education would have a direct influence on their work options and choices, something that subsequent principals also understood with the increasing marketisation of education. A family’s

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8 Bianca Payne, E-mail narrative, 28 November 2004.
economic circumstances often influenced a girl’s post-school choices, with many going into traditional female jobs such as teaching, nursing and office work, for economic reasons (including adding their financial support to their families) when they may have preferred to go on to higher education. Former principal, Gabrielle Blood’s admission that she eventually took up a teaching studentship to ease the financial burden of her university education on her family was not an uncommon experience.

Women’s narratives suggest that former students developed a close association between the work they went into after leaving school and their own identities—at the time and retrospectively. Some choices were made for careers that were at great cost to other possible choices, including marriage and motherhood. Work and careers were seen by some women as integral to affirming their sense of self, their autonomy, and their capacity to do things beyond traditional expectations and possibilities for women—to stretch, even redefine, boundaries through their achievements. Messages former students imbibed—or believe retrospectively they were given at school—to excel, to change the world, to have better lives than their parents perhaps had, to become leaders within their communities, to have an impact on the world, to not waste their education, have caused conflict for some in later years. In her article in *Athene* in 2003, Caroline Roberts (Hunting) spoke for some former students when she expressed her own misgivings at what she regarded as a missing piece of her life—a good balance between the professional and personal life with one not dominating the other, and the option of motherhood if that is something she might have stopped to consider if she had not been so driven to be the ‘wonder woman’. Girls who excelled academically were encouraged by their principals and teachers to consider going on to university. But, for much of the school’s past, the majority of Mac.Rob girls did not think about going on to university—they could not learn how to be a secretary there. Many spent six months or a year at a business college before entering the workforce in traditional female occupations. In a few documented cases, teachers contributed financially to enable a girl to go onto higher education in order to achieve her potential. Often having to convince parents that a university education was not a waste of time for a daughter. Potential (and possible) careers, nonetheless, were not always clear to all students, and many Mac.Rob girls’ paths beyond

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9 Not wasting one’s education was a common theme in women’s narratives. Education was regarded as a privilege for girls for much of the twentieth century, particularly for working-class and lower middle-class girls.

10 Caroline Roberts (Hunting), *Athene*, 2003, p. 41. Many may disagree with Caroline Roberts—it is the way of Mac.Rob, the multiplicity of perspectives.

11 Some former students express appreciation to a teacher who told them about a particular career or course, knowledge they would not have gained otherwise. Some wonder how different their lives may have been without this intervention and support.
school took a variety of directions, particularly after they had raised their families. In more recent times, with the increased marketisation of education and accompanying fierce competition for some university courses, Mac.Rob students have access to knowledge networks and a vast amount of information about career pathways, career options, competitions, internships, work experience and scholarships. Some students, in fact, divulge that the information and networking of careers advisors are sometimes valued more highly than actual teaching at Mac.Rob, because they broaden knowledge about girls’ career choices and options.

**Academic success versus status?**

There is another issue regarding identity and the Mac.Rob girl that stood out in the narratives and many impromptu discussions with more recent students. It concerns the changing migrant background of the student population. When this research project began, one former staff member suggested that the history might be able to throw some light on future patterns of ethnicity at Mac.Rob. At the time, her motives were not clear, but it became apparent during interviews that such information might be useful in planning for Mac.Rob’s future. Mac.Rob has been home to girls from numerous migrant backgrounds (with their diverse nationalities, religions, languages and cultures) since the early 1930s. Its student demographic reflects broad patterns of immigration throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century. The Jewish contingent was dominant between 1935 and the 1960s and memories of their presence remain powerful for women who were at Mac.Rob during those years. Many of the Jewish girls were daughters, nieces and cousins of Holocaust survivors and some were survivors themselves. Jewish girls are mentioned frequently in former students’ narratives as women contrast their own lives, attitudes and behaviours with those of their Jewish classmates, while some remember them as stuck-up intellectuals who kept to themselves and rarely mixed with the other girls, other women saw the Jewish girls as inspirational role models and express

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12 Ethnicity to me encompasses nationality, culture, religion and language. There is a thread of common experience that many girls share, particularly those who were born in Australia but whose parents were not. I have been told by girls whose parents came from Greece, Russia, Hungary, Italy, China, Malaysia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Sri Lanka and India that they shift between the nationalist, cultural, linguistic and religious identities of their parents’ birthplaces and that of Australia. They know that they are Australian by birth, but identity is often complex for them. This is consistent with other studies of ethnicity and identity into the second and third generations. See for example, Siew-Ean Khoo, Peter McDonald, Dimi Georgas and Bob Birrell, 2002, *Second Generation Australians*, Australian Centre for Population Research and the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, Canberra. Note particularly ‘Conclusions’, p. 6 that argue that the ‘second generation of some Southern European, Eastern European and Asian origins are more likely to achieve better educational outcomes than those of other origins’.
gratitude to them for opening up their narrower worlds through experience of Jewish cuisine, music, art, intellectual discussion and, according to some women, the frank sharing of sexual knowledge.

In the 1980s and 1990s in Australia there was an enlarged intake of migrants from Asia, the Middle-East and, more recently, from Africa. Migrants from the United Kingdom had dominated from the beginning of the twentieth century through to the 1980s and 1990s, although daughters of these migrants were less likely than their continental European counterparts to seek out Mac.Rob. Gradually the number of Chinese-born migrants increased to where they, along with migrants from South-East Asia and India, dominated patterns of migration; this change is reflected in Mac.Rob’s student demographic.\textsuperscript{13} There were other earlier ‘waves’ of immigration including Greeks, French, Italians, Poles, Russians, Czechs and Hungarians who arrived in Australia in the post-war period. These were heavily represented at Mac.Rob as parents sought out the school because of its academic and moral reputation, particularly when they could not afford the costs of private schooling. Former students’ narratives reveal many cases where parents chose to send a son to a private school and a daughter to Mac.Rob when finances were tight. The ethnic mix of the student population currently reflects more than sixty languages (although language is but one measure of ethnicity) spoken in girls’ homes and multiculturalism and cultural diversity have been long celebrated at Mac.Rob.

Where once Jewish girls featured large in the student population, girls of Asian background make up a large proportion of the student enrolment. This change in the cultural base has provoked some concerns within the school community, two of which I mention here. The first concern is more often expressed by former students who value the traditions of their old school and are worried that those traditions will be eroded and displaced by increasing cultural diversity. They are worried that a century’s tradition will become irrelevant and obsolete, perhaps even supplanted by other traditions, leaving their old school unrecognisable. They are concerned that their old school will not remain the school they experienced and remember, that its essence will somehow change along with its traditional (to them, core) values and ideals. The second concern argues that girls of Asian migrant background prioritise academic success to the detriment of the leadership and personal development aspects of the curriculum (the co-curricular program). Changing migrant backgrounds at Mac.Rob and MHS actually became the focus of public discussion in the Age

in October 2004 when MHS lamented the effect of increasing numbers of boys of Asian background on its inability to continue to field competitive football teams—success in football being a strong component of MHS tradition.\textsuperscript{14} The problem was, the article explained, that parents prefer that their sons focus on their academic studies rather than waste valuable time on sports, particularly as sporting injuries could affect their studies. At Mac.Rob, girls of Asian background confirm that their parents also prefer that they concentrate on their academic studies, although they do approve of the valuable leadership experience and the comparative advantage their daughters can gain through election to the Student Representative Council (SRC). Mac.Rob has drawn in first and second-generation children of refugees—daughters of the ‘boat people’ and other refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos between 1978 and 1987, for example.\textsuperscript{15} Others have settled in Australia more recently with the aim to give their children better futures. Recent and current students explain that their parents sacrifice a great deal for their daughters so that they can receive the best education possible, an education that will lead them into prestigious professions such as medicine, pharmacy, architecture, law and the arts—prestigious professions that their daughters can leave for motherhood and re-enter later on if they wish.

For some former students, there are implications of changing cultural patterns, particularly of the decreasing number of students of Anglo-Saxon and European backgrounds.\textsuperscript{16} They worry that Mac.Rob may no longer be able to offer the cultural and social capital that it has offered so successfully since it began in 1905.\textsuperscript{17} There are parents who refuse to allow their daughters to sit the entrance examination for Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School because they do not approve of its cultural mix. Perhaps some do not take into account, or see value in, the paradigm of the migrant experience, which privileges academic success over the social and cultural capital cachet of a Mac.Rob education. There is a belief that only through academic success can the children of migrant parents overcome the economic and social deprivation of previous generations. This is in fact a part of Mac.Rob’s tradition too. Women’s narratives attest to the experiences of migrant parents from the 1930s into the twenty-first century who scrimped and saved and worked long hours in a variety of socially ‘inferior’ occupations to pay for their children’s educations. Current concerns (among former students) that Mac.Rob is losing its connections to its traditional past and values can arguably be described as

\textsuperscript{14} Caroline Milburn, ‘Top School Bottoms Out when it Comes to Football’, \textit{Age} 4 October 2004; See also \textit{Age}, 4 March 2006, p. 7
\textsuperscript{15} There were more than 130,000 refugees from these South Asian countries who settled in Australia up to 1987.
\textsuperscript{17} P. Parker’s journal, 2005.
stemming from an ideological struggle between those who regard education as a privilege and those who see education in functional terms. The problem, according to those who regret the changes and who shared their feelings for the school history project, is that the instrumental view lacks feeling for the traditional past. They argue that it is pragmatic and mechanistic and devoid of the emotional connection to those who have gone before and what they represent.

3. Success and failure

_The impact of schooling is deeper and more complex than what can be counted or measured._18

_I heard a great deal about how to achieve career success at school, but what did Mac.Rob teach us about life values? What about something on how career selection might impact your personal life? Hell bent on breaking with traditional roles and producing perfect power women, it seems as if family priorities and other paths to personal fulfilment were overlooked ... or ignored. How about being told that pursuing a career until your mid thirties might render you childless, against your wishes?_19

By 2005, Mac.Rob was regarded as a ticket to university for those seeking an edge in a highly competitive arena for each of its VCE students received first-round tertiary offers.20 Mac.Rob that year was one of only 22 schools in which every final-year student had applied for tertiary entrance.21 Entry to Mac.Rob offers comparative advantage for those aspiring to professional careers; it is also a cheap alternative to the private schools. Success, however, has meant different things to Mac.Rob women. While one definition reflects the influence of current cut-throat education markets, there is a core belief within the Mac.Rob community that there is more to success than examination scores. Academic success, which is about examination results and what students achieve socially and economically after leaving school, can be a narrow measure of a girl’s schooling experience.22 The problem in thinking about all of this in terms of the evidence available is that time plays a critical role in conceptualising success, particularly broader definitions not based on numerical rankings and scores. Michael Frisch

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18 Connell et al, Making the Difference, p. 127.
20 See Appendix 5.
21 This was in fact a decrease from the previous year when all students from 34 schools had applied. See Herald Sun, 15 December 2005, p. 14, and Chee Chee Leung, ‘Girls’ School Tops VCE Again’, Age, 15 December 2005.
22 That said, academic success is one of Mac.Rob’s primary goal in keeping with its desire to provide the kind of education that girls’ seek as well as remain competitive within the Victorian education landscape.
argues that ‘contemporary contexts operate as a sort of rearguard attack on the structure of memory’. Perhaps, too, contemporary contexts place pressure on some Mac.Rob women to be successful when, in their own time and contexts, success meant something different. In the early decades of Mac.Rob’s existence, for example, it was not a tragedy for a girl to *not* aspire to a university education, or to fail examinations. Until 1970 at least, they could get into courses such as teaching and nursing without a matriculation certificate, and, for many, having been to Mac.Rob gave them a distinct advantage in the job stakes when credentials were not as important as they are at present. There was a time when character development was regarded as more important than academic excellence.

The point is that Mac.Rob, often retrospectively, gave some of its students ideas about what they could achieve and, perhaps, what they should have achieved. Some women feel that they did not fulfil the promise that they revealed as students. A girl who had to leave school early or do a commercial class may feel cheated, sold short and dissatisfied, as if the social world in a particular time conspired against them as individuals. Many have redressed that by achieving university degrees and other higher educational qualifications as mature-aged women. They have entered and re-entered the workforce and are happy. Others wanted to do more but for various reasons did not and feel like failures in comparison to the academic success, and celebration of that success, of contemporary students. Some have gone so far as to apologise for not being ‘successful’ as Mac.Rob women, so self-conscious are they of their life-paths beyond school in comparison to the illusion of success and the multiplicity of perspectives that shape the Mac.Rob identity. Nevertheless, numerous former students carved out successful careers in the law and the arts, in literature, in academia and education, in medicine, health and social services, and in business—with a good proportion of those from the post-1980 years occupying middle-management positions and owning their own businesses. In theorising success and failure at this school, it is possible that there are women who privilege experiences that are out of the ordinary, such as working in a mine as an engineer for Rio Tinto, in contrast to the mundane—occupations that do not attract and enjoy popular images of being exciting or perhaps ground-breaking for women or for society more generally. Such feeling suggests that there has been some reification of the idea of being a Mac.Rob girl and expectations of that girl. While the evidence of women’s narratives suggests that this is more common among former students prior to the mid-1980s, it is not the case for all, for that same evidence continually shows that Mac.Rob, being a Mac.Rob girl, success and failure, mean different things to different people.
4. Mac.Rob in the Victorian education landscape

Last year [2005], the Age’s education section carefully analysed the increasing participation and significance of alumni groups in single sex schools. Where boys' schools had fostered and cultivated old hat relationships for centuries, the confined and limited roles of a majority of women outside of the home meant that most girls' schools continued without the financial benefits and wisdom that past students had to offer. Indeed where old boys conquered their chosen domains and came to share their successes, financial and otherwise, their wives left their connections with the past and thus severed any hope for connections with the future. While the effects of this are still evident today there is most definitely an undercurrent of change with more women entering into significant roles of business and leadership and increasingly becoming a valuable source of educational inspiration for the coming generations.

Effie Kulas, Mac.Rob School Captain, 2006

In 1905, Mac.Rob as the Melbourne Continuation School came into existence to provide a good education for Victoria’s future teachers. Its focus was not on the education of girls for girls’ own sakes; rather, it was responsive to and influenced by nationalist and civic concerns in the context of a developing young nation anxious to educate its citizens to secure its future. Soon after it began, the school was in competition with the private and corporate education sector as it began to provide access to the university for those academically bright young women and men who could not afford, but deserved the opportunity for, a university education. Less than thirty years after the school was established, the prioritisation of boys’ education saw Melbourne High School split along gender lines and Mac.Rob (as Melbourne Girls’ High School) began an on-going fight to survive as a single-sex academic high school. With Mac.Rob’s main competition coming from the private school sector, its existence within the Victorian education landscape brought challenges from other state high schools seeking academic prestige and success. More recently, in 2005, competition for students saw Mac.Rob’s dominance at the VCE examinations challenged by the Select-Entry Accelerated Learning Program, popularly known as SEAL, currently available in 34 Victorian state high schools. SEAL schools are able to offer places to students outside their local catchment area, as is Mac.Rob as a state-wide provider of secondary education for girls. The program is regarded by some as a useful weapon in the fight against the residualisation of the comprehensive high school and the drift of state high school students to the private school

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system, as well as Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School and MHS. (It can also be argued that the SEAL program actually contributes to the problem of residualisation as parents favour these schools instead of moving into the private school sector—thus draining non-SEAL schools of their talented and gifted students.) Some Victorian state high schools have introduced the Australian Council of Educational Research-developed Higher Ability Selection Test (HAST) in order to compete with the SEAL schools and Mac.Rob and MHS at attracting and selecting gifted and talented students. With increasing pressure to stem the flow of gifted and talented students from comprehensive state high schools, the Victorian Minister for Education & Training, Lyn Kosky, was adamant in 2004 that there would be no more ‘Mac.Robs’, as this school, in her opinion, sends the wrong message to those unable to get in that they are not good enough.  

Mac.Rob has been an Elysian fields for some women, a place where they felt blessed and happy as students, and they continue to feel this way long after leaving. Others, as we have seen, regard it more pragmatically as a means to an end. They wanted a good education, their parents wanted better lives for them than they had led in many cases, and Mac.Rob was the place to be when they could not afford the private system or did not want what alternative systems offered. For these women, Mac.Rob had a job to do, and, if the girl worked hard and passed the examinations, her schooling experience was a success. With the approach of the school’s centenary in 2005, current and recent students thought about what Mac.Rob meant to them, and some contrasted present experiences with those of past students. Stephanie Rendell and Avital Lipski, year 12 students in 2004, reflected on the difference between their experiences as Mac.Rob girls and those of their predecessors. They argued that contemporary students enjoy far more freedoms and choices than did earlier students. To them, Mac.Rob’s recipe for success lies in the opportunities its students enjoy to achieve whatever they desire, and the power they have to make their own decisions. ‘Strip away the signs, ceremonies and

emblems’, they argued, ‘and you find the true traditions of the school in companionship, tolerance, equality, integrity and, most importantly, a desire to learn’. These two young women may well have recognised that many choices are made within a framework of tradition and that it can actually take courage to acknowledge that there is a choice.

Perhaps the final word in this school history can go to Adrian Jones, current (and out-going) President of the School Council. The Harvard-educated Jones, now a historian at La Trobe University, is convinced that Mac.Rob changes people. This is no ‘pie-in-the-sky’ romantic observation, however. Jones is quick to point out that Mac.Rob faces particular challenges, in his opinion. One such challenge lies with some members of staff who have ‘stayed put for a little too long’ and are ‘unable to meet the constant challenges that come with internal and external pressure to maintain the school’s position within education in Victoria’. Jones acknowledges that for both student and teacher, ‘talent and anxiety and success and tribulation often go hand in hand’. He wonders, however, as he finds himself half way through his final year of school council presidency, if Mac.Rob is changing enough people. In reflecting on how Mac.Rob does change people, he is reflecting on the nature and purpose of education itself. ‘We have about 840 students in a school site so small that you can’t even play kick to kick. Our brother school (MHS) has 1365 students on a site so extensive you can stick to stick as well as kick to kick’, he states in Vista. He questions whether the Mac.Rob community should be satisfied with the way things are at present, and he ponders whether the school should expand its student demographic to allow more girls to experience Mac.Rob. Jones believes that Mac.Rob should be able to increase its student intake to allow more girls the opportunity to experience what Mac.Rob can provide: ‘There must be other girls out there who would benefit from the other great things that Mac.Rob has to offer’. And he declares that his ears are ‘still ringing with the comment of a student, “I’d be nothing like as interesting as I am now if I’d stayed in my old high school”’.27

In 1905, enrolments at the new Melbourne Continuation School had to be capped at 400 when too many students applied for too few places. In 2005, over 1200 students sat the entrance examination for fewer than 300 places at Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School. Demand for entry grows while Mac.Rob’s ethnic mix adjusts to that demand. A truly culturally diverse school, Mac.Rob continues to work to maintain its broad and popular

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26 This is precisely the point made thirty years previously in the report Girls, Schools and Society in 1975. See McKinnon, Girls, School and Society, p. 11.
27 Adrian Jones, I’d be nothing like I am now, Vista, Autumn 2006, p. 8.
appeal in the light of its century-long, elite relationship with the university as a statewide provider of girls’ secondary education, to remain competitive with the private school sector, and to extend and restructure its profiles of educational provision according to the needs of its students and the directions of the state education bureaucracy of which it is a part. On 11 November 2006, however, the Victorian Labor government announced during its election campaign that it will build two more selective state high schools, one on North Melbourne and one in the eastern suburbs. This is an abrupt about-face from their previously-expressed determination to allow no more Mac.Robs. Unlike Mac.Rob and MHS, these future selective schools will be co-educational. This announcement has generated fears that any more selective schools will seriously weaken the diversity and academic strength of the state comprehensive high school as parents seek out the more academically superior schools. Victorian Liberal party leader, Ted Bailleau, has announced that if his party wins government at the upcoming elections, he will build four new academically selective schools. Mac.Rob, then, can expect to become bound up in further debates about single-sex and selective schooling—debates similar to those that have occurred in New South Wales as the fight to save the comprehensive high school’s power and capacity to provide a first-class secondary education has continued. What these changes in the Victorian education landscape mean for Mac.Rob and for the education of girls more generally remain the focus of further historical studies.
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Appendix 1

Melbourne Continuation School and Melbourne High School
Melbourne University 1906–1921

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<td>Pupils who passed Junior Public or Intermediate</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>203</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils who passed Senior Public or Leaving</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>123</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Government Scholarships</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nominated Government Scholarships*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships and Exhibitions University Colleges</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honours at Senior Public Leaving</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>81</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex-students who passed Their years at University</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>136</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degrees conferred on ex-students</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diplomas of Education conferred on ex-students</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Introduced in 1914

[During the past ten years [1921–1911] 1,855 candidates have passed the Junior Public or intermediate Examination: 824 have passed the Senior Public or Leaving: 99 Government Scholarships have been won: 104 scholarships and Exhibitions have been gained and 143 Degrees conferred on ex-pupils of the school].
Appendix 2

Adelaide visit 1969

Fri 15 Aug Arrival

Sat 16 Aug Free day with hostesses

Sun 17 Aug 11:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. Healesville trip and barbecue.

Mon 18 Aug 8:30 a.m. Welcome assembly
10:00 a.m. Softball, Harry Trott oval
12:00 Form III buffet lunch
2:00 p.m. Tennis, St Kilda courts
8:00 p.m. Debate and musical evening, MGHS

Tues 19 Aug. 10:15 a.m. Hockey, Harry Trott oval
11:45 a.m. Form IV buffet lunch
1:30 p.m. Basketball, MGHS courts
8:00 p.m. Dance, MGHS

Wed. 20 Aug. Farewell assembly and departure
Appendix 3

Educational and Professional Opportunity as measured by the Distribution of University Degrees

Academic Origins of Graduates, University of Melbourne, 1939

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Faculty</th>
<th>Numbers from each Type School</th>
<th>Percentage Distribution</th>
<th>Number Not Included</th>
<th>Total No. of Graduates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts (Ord.)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts (Hon.)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agric. Science</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dentistry</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Graduates</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>24.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 1939 75% of university graduates came from private schools and they dominated all courses except dentistry.

### Appendix 4

**STUDENT TRANSFERS AT MAC.ROBERTSON GIRLS’ HIGH SCHOOL**  
**JULY 1985 – DECEMBER 1993**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Choice</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/personal choice</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change of address</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprenticeship</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>103</strong></td>
<td><strong>184</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Information taken from school transfer registers prior to computerization of school records. MGHS Archive.

**Parent/student choice:** Letters from parents withdrawing their daughters indicate that parent and personal choice for leaving Mac.Rob meant different things: some girls were not coping with their studies and some records showed up to 42 of school absences prior to withdrawal. Some girls were unhappy at Mac.Rob and wanted to return to their old schools. Two letters in 1991 revealed pressure on the student as the reason for withdrawal. Parent/student choice is somewhat euphemistic, but in the main, girls found that they did not fit in or enjoy Mac.Rob and did not wish to remain there. Eight students in this period were awarded scholarships to private schools.

**Course choice:** Letters reveal that Mac.Rob did not offer subjects required for non-academic pathways, particularly commerce, although it has also been suggested that some girls found the academic course too difficult and were unwilling to, or could not, cope with the pressure they felt they were under.
Appendix 5

Destination of year 12 students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course type</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pharmacy</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physiotherapy</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optometry</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech therapy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dental science</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radiography</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dentistry</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational therapy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chiropractic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce/science</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering/science</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts/science</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts/commerce</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative arts</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information technology</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>223</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Latin school song

**Music:** Dr. A. E. Floyd  
**Words:** Mr. W. Kerry, M.A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latin</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>His veteribus sub tectis</td>
<td>In these halls where youth rejoices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmen vocibus sescentis</td>
<td>Let the sound of many voices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrate virginum</td>
<td>Tell in song our daily round:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mistos lusibus labores</td>
<td>Exercise, and steady learning,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strenuos dies lucernas</td>
<td>Active days, and lights late burning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haud ingratum otium</td>
<td>Leisure hours when joys abound.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chorus**  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latin</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Operosa fructuosa</td>
<td>Firm in striving, fine in action,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita debet exigi</td>
<td>Such our life should ever be;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neu praeceptum</td>
<td>Nor unheeded go the precept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sit infectum</td>
<td>Pallas gives: “Potens Sui”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palladis, potens sui.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latin</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quid si, per iocus et risum</td>
<td>What if mid the fun and laughter,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupare dona visum</td>
<td>We may seem to follow after</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juventutis aurea</td>
<td>But youth’s golden gifts so fair,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Num quid setius explemus</td>
<td>What if we fulfil by slowly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Munus debitum videmus</td>
<td>Tasks that must be done; yet wholly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quae subsint certamina</td>
<td>We perceive the challenge there.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Appendix Seven
School Song—Vale

Music and words: J. Bennett and G. Findlay

Farewell, old school
Farewell dear years of life within your halls,
Fair years of laughter, toil and tears,
To me a new voice calls;
Others more great
Shall cry your name to men triumphantly.
I have no gifts to crown your fame,
Save love and loyalty.

For mightier hands than mine
Shall write your odyssey of glory.
And loftier thoughts than these
Shall light the pages of your story.
And sweeter tongues than mine
Shall sing in more melodious lays
That down the winds of time
Shall sing the echoes of your praise.

For me your hands have helped
To mould the hopes and dreams of youth
All that my life shall ever hold of beauty,
Honour, Truth, I owe to you:
And now we part, but should I rise or fall,
I only know that, in my heart,
Always your voice will call.

Appendix 8
Mission Statement

To excel in the provision of education for girls in an intellectually vibrant community.

School Motto

Pallas Athena (Minerva) is the school logo. Underneath is the school motto, *Potens Sui*, Latin for ‘mastery of self’. The school adheres to a code of conduct based on self-discipline and responsibility to oneself and others.

Guiding Values

The Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School is committed to:

- engendering a love of learning
- offering an education based on liberal - democratic values
- achieving unparalleled academic success
- providing a challenging, tolerant and supportive environment
- fostering confidence, responsibility and self-discipline
- cultivating integrity and mutual respect
- developing effective leadership skills
- meeting the challenges of the future while respecting the past