

Conclusion

The College's place and identity as a school in Geelong and regional Victoria have been central to this story, as well as the educational, religious and social contexts in which the College operated during times of war, peace and recession. Central threads of the College's history have become evident, and it is these threads that are fundamental to an understanding of the College, for many run through the school's 150-year history.

The College's strongest ties throughout its history have been to Geelong. The deep link to Geelong is also the most individual characteristic of the College compared with other independent schools, particularly those in Melbourne. Former Head of the Preparatory School, Mr Lawson, believed that the location of the College in a regional city makes for 'stronger links to the community, including links with our school families, sporting clubs and the general Geelong community'.¹ While links to regional Victoria have seemed indelible for most of its 150-year history, the loosening of boarding ties and, consequently, links to a broader base, in turn strengthens local ties to the city of Geelong. 'The College is a community school, in a sense; it draws on Geelong, although it still has a small boutique boarding component', remarks Mrs Lethbridge.²

College ties to the city of Geelong have also grown because of demand. Geelong's population was around 212,000 in 2008. The area, including the Bellarine and the Surf Coast, is expected to continue to grow by at least one per cent each year.³ The College's twenty-year Master Plan (2008–28) anticipates enrolment growth as Geelong expands. Although more students from areas immediately outside Geelong are enrolling at the College, numbers are not significant enough to warrant the establishment of a new campus, compared to the enormous growth in the area in the 1950s and 1960s which precipitated the building of the separate Preparatory School. Instead, College Council encouraged the College Foundation to purchase land in Fyansford in 2009. It is big enough for future subdivision, thereby keeping the College's options open to use part of it for investment purposes, and the rest for educational purposes.⁴ It could, for example, provide sporting fields only minutes from the Preparatory School, should new buildings on that site be needed to cater for a growing student population, as Dr Seward expects: 'I anticipate that we *will* have to expand to cope with perhaps another 200 students

– then we may have to use some of that space at the Preparatory School'.⁵ Most, if not all, of these anticipated 200 students are likely to be day students.

Prior to the 1970s, the College's ties to regional Victoria were just as strong as they are now to Geelong. It was not so much The Geelong College, but 'the College of Victoria' in the nineteenth century.⁶ The College's role as a boarding school had great importance to regional Victoria – especially the Western District – during its first 110 years. Despite relatively small student numbers overall, around half were boarders from the 1870s to the 1910s, and the proportion of boarders remained at between one-third and one-half of the school's total enrolment until the 1970s. Their constant presence at the College established a strong boarding culture which, underlined by selection of boarders as captains of sports teams and the majority of the prefect group, placed them at the top of the school hierarchy and dominated the College's identity. At its best, boarding created strong friendships, fierce loyalty to the College, and access to levels of education not available to families who lived in remote rural communities. At worst, boarders were isolated and bullied into conformity and, as a group, created a deep gulf between themselves and day boys that, at times (especially during the 1960s and 1970s), caused the College to despair about the types of relationships being created at the school. Boarders' dominance remained unchanged until the 1970s, when the College became, relatively quickly, a day school with some boarders. Since then, boarders have never made up more than 10 per cent of the student population.

The recent debilitating drought, recession and the continued development of other educational institutions in regional Victoria are among the chief factors that will decide boarding's future, and are part of the continuing cycle of external forces that challenge the College's status quo and its growth. The economic recessions in the 1970s and 1990s had the greatest impact since the two depressions of the 1890s and 1930s, and the two world wars. Hard work and determination are necessary for any institution to weather all these challenges; the College has done this and is now among the oldest schools in Australia. This great sense of journeying is one reason why ties to the Western District will remain strong during the lifetimes of former Old Collegians who enrolled from this region between the 1930s and the 1980s, when Australia's wool production was at its peak. Farming and grazing families still accounted for 20 per cent of the College's enrolment by 1975.⁷ Although the drought has caused a considerable drop in wool production during the last decade, Victoria still contributes around 20 per cent of the annual wool clip.⁸ As well as environmental factors, a reduction in the number of families reliant on the land among the College's demographic has also been a result of local competition for enrolments.

Difficulties between boarders and day boys was, of course, one of the key factors that motivated Mr Thwaites to pursue the introduction of co-education. How did co-education change the culture of the College? This, more than any other single decision was the College's watershed, as it provided a profound sense of modernisation. Although co-education took about twenty years to become fully embedded within College culture – represented tangibly in numbers of female students and teachers and, ultimately, with its first female Principal in 1996 – it is now an accepted basis of the College's operation. Its introduction also coincided with the dramatic decline in boarding, so making the 1970s a particularly significant era for the College. Co-education, as remarked on by students, teachers and parents, 'softened' the College; made the place less formal when conventions such as addressing students by their surnames dropped away; improved boys' social skills and gave both boys and girls the benefits

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of learning to understand each other from an early age. As John O'Brien says, 'it taught me to interact and to be a bit more understanding of the opposite sex'.⁹ Co-education allowed, too, for a readier acceptance of a greater balance in the curriculum. Partly in response to the needs of female students and partly as Principal Mr Gebhardt's greatest gift to the College, the range and selection of Arts and Humanities subjects and activities increased. Co-education boosted the College financially, when declining numbers were a concern in the junior Preparatory years during the 1970s. Overall, its smooth introduction, with relatively few naysayers, was remarkable. Parents with both sons and daughters have since been able to enjoy the ease of one inclusive, family-oriented community. 'Co-education makes of education itself a much more desirable, vital and invigorating experience', said Dr Turner in 1996, 'and the importance of the enjoyment factor cannot be underestimated in a world predicated on the notion of learning for life. There is no doubt in my mind as to the level of contentment to be found within co-educational schools: they are happier and more balanced communities in general.'¹⁰

Similarly, Church ties have been integral to the College's identity and, aside from the rocky beginnings in the 1860s, the College's affiliation with the Presbyterian Church in 1908 and, later, the Uniting Church remained relatively free of the bitterness experienced by Scotch College. While at times constraining, this relationship has greatly benefited the College through the agency of influential Presbyterian educators and their interrelationships with other key Melbourne educational institutions. George Morrison's relationship to his brother Alexander, Principal of Scotch College and later founder of Ormond College, were at the core of this during The Geelong College's first fifty years. The fruitful link with Ormond College continued through the first Master, Sir John Macfarland, and subsequent Masters, Dr McCaughey and Professor Hugh Collins, who also sat on The Geelong College Council. Even after the College's incorporation in 1982, which loosened ties between it and the Uniting Church, students still worshipped at St David's, attended Religious Education or Scripture classes and progressed from the College to Ormond as residents. Recent expressions of the College's ties to the Church included the establishment of a chapel in 1989, regularly used and to which some Old Collegians return for their weddings. The teaching of general Christian values has made the College more inclusive of all faiths, although ties to the Uniting Church are likely to remain.

Understanding the College's changing relationship with Geelong Grammar is another key thread of the College's 150 years. Until the establishment of Timbertop lured more students to Geelong Grammar, the College was the preferred Geelong school among parents who sought higher academic outcomes. Apart from different sectarian backgrounds, the key differences between the two Geelong schools have always been academic reputation, size and socio-economic factors. Demographic differences are now wider than ever, given the College's steady transformation from a boarding school to a day school with a large majority of students coming from Newtown and its immediate surrounds, compared to the national and international make-up of Grammar's mostly wealthy boarding enrolment. 'Grammar is a different school, and detached from the Geelong community. It is called Geelong Grammar but is not really a Geelong school', comments Mr Williamson.¹¹ The closed-campus feel of Grammar remains mysterious and uninviting for many College people. College now rejoices in its stronger community ties developed, for example, through the Austin Gray Centre, community service and outreach activities.

The passionate emphasis on competitive sport and its associated traditions, particularly after Norman Morrison's return to the College as Vice Principal, is yet another prominent

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theme of the College's history: APS affiliation, achieved just before his death, and the resultant status derived from formal links with Geelong Grammar, Scotch College, Melbourne Grammar, Wesley College and Xavier College, helped to ensure the College's future. In an address, Colin Macdonald declared:

Whatever the faults or the virtues of the six large Boys' Church Schools in Melbourne and Geelong, grouped together as the Associated Public Schools of Victoria, there appears to be much to substantiate the claim that they are unique, not only in Australia, but even throughout the world, because of their solidarity, their uniformity of viewpoints, and their educational, sporting, social and professional importance in this State; they form an extremely well knit and influential association.¹³

However, APS affiliation also demanded of the College greater sporting prowess than it possessed. The main difference between the original six APS schools was that the College was considerably smaller for most of its history, less well known, and often confused by Melbourne people for Geelong Grammar. Its size meant that 'it didn't have a particularly elaborate or embedded sense of itself', compared to the other APS schools.¹³ The College's almost constant disappointment about sport performances, once keenly felt when at the bottom of the original heap of only six APS schools, has lessened considerably now that there are eleven schools, and since co-education was introduced. Some 65 per cent of the College's APS Premiership wins have been achieved since the 1980s.¹⁴

The less rigorous academic culture of the College from the 1910s to the 1970s, wrought by the confluence of many factors – encompassing parental expectations, generational dominance of Western District farming families, shortages of teachers at different times, an emphasis on values and life skills during Mr Rolland's period, and overcrowded facilities by the 1950s – meant that the College's reputation was, for some time, based on characteristics other than high academic standards. With the availability of boarding at all of the APS schools, parents from regional Victoria were able to access educational opportunities and social networks far broader than were available in or near to their sometimes isolated communities. These opportunities were valued by generations of College students:

Many of these students who did not have academic aspirations still benefited enormously from a general education and time at The Geelong College. There were many other activities at which they could excel, including sport, music, cadets, and activities in the House of Guilds, all of which were encouraged. There was great sense of cohesion and social responsibility in the school. They would make a much wider circle of friends and acquaintances than they would have made in their local communities. Many of these boys subsequently made their mark in public life in their local and wider communities, the professions, the business world, and also remained great supporters of the school for the rest of their days.¹⁵

Old Collegians represent a diverse cross-section of careers and occupations, and many can be found in the College's *Geelong College Illustrated Heritage Guide*. They have taken their places among the ranks of Australian federal, state and local government politicians, and some have served internationally. Many former Mayors of Geelong attended the College, and many Old Collegian local businessmen were strongly involved in the Geelong branches of Apex and Rotary. 'Somebody once referred to the "Geelong College mafia" as being the powerful influence in Geelong of Old Collegians, which is true. In the 1930s and 1940s,

and for decades afterwards, leadership in Geelong was by Old Collegians', reflects Geoff Neilson. Lawyers and local legal firms played an important role in Geelong's leadership circle, and two of Geelong's oldest law firms – Whyte, Just and Moore and Harwood and Pincott (now Harwood Andrews) – have employed many Old Collegians. Some extended their local influence to become prominent Australian business leaders. Others have made their mark as barristers, Supreme Court judges, university academics and scientists, Church ministers and Presbyterian moderators, health professionals, architects, engineers, soldiers, philanthropists, writers, entertainers, musicians, artists, actors, teachers, school principals, journalists, community activists, adventurers and sportsmen, such as AFL footballers, swimmers, rowers, Test cricketers and Olympians. Collegians have filled the world beyond the College in a multitude of vocations and activities – their influence in the development of our communities has been both profound and beneficial.

It has been expected, since the 1980s, that students graduate now with good VCE results that enable tertiary study as well as life skills and the benefit of a well-rounded education that has included leadership opportunities, involvement in the performing arts, and membership of sports teams. Dr Turner reminded us, in 2000, that 'the world is made up of all sorts of people, who have contributed often in fairly ordinary ways to the life of their community'. She added that a school is not ultimately judged by the quality (or quantity) of its shining stars:

but on the quality of its ordinary citizens who pass more discretely through its ranks ... What we and your families have sought to inculcate, and with a considerable degree of success ... are certain values, including those of commitment, respect, a sense of decency, an understanding of community and a willingness to contribute and have a 'go'. These are enduring values which will stand you in good stead on your future pathways, wherever they may lead you, alongside the many lasting friendships you have formed in the course of your life at this school.¹⁶

The development of transposable skills – skills of flexibility and adaptability, ICT competence, communication, teamwork, problem-solving, resilience and emotional intelligence – to be used throughout life, has also been underlined, together with the perpetuation of the College's values.¹⁷ 'I'm grateful to the College', reflects Gideon Haigh, 'for having provided that education and for having introduced me to people who were so absolutely ordinary and who had so few pretensions'.¹⁸ 'You're a down-to-earth person when you graduate from College', agrees Amanda May.¹⁹ Learning these life skills from such a diverse range of opportunities has enabled many students to 'internalise the College motto and pursue stellar goals'.²⁰ 'We can forge ahead with the knowledge and confidence that we are individually well equipped to take on life's challenges', says Jessica Uebergang (2008). The skills and values learnt at the College, 'such as respect for others, responsibility, team work, tolerance and self confidence, are of paramount importance and provide the fundamental characteristics we can take into young adulthood and beyond'.²¹