

Co-education

Mr Thwaites' most radical decision in the quest for better behaviour and balanced relationships within the College was the introduction of co-education. It was regarded as a philosophical step for most at the College – a civilising influence that would have a profound impact on the school's culture – but its genesis derived from alarm at the declining enrolments in the Lower Primary years. The resulting boost to enrolments would not hurt the College's finances, also suffering from a sharp decline in boarding enrolments.

Girls were not a completely unfamiliar sight in College grounds. Senior girls from Morongo and The Hermitage had attended Science classes at the College during the 1940s.¹ In 1960, girls from Morongo and boys from the College formed a combined Drama Club, and boys no longer had to play female roles in the annual school play. There was an overlap of membership of Councils of both schools. For example, the Chairman of Morongo Council, Cedric Hirst (1925), was also an Old Collegian and had been a member of the College Council since 1948. Mr Neilson took prominent roles on both Councils, too, as did Old Collegian Ernie McCann (1924), who was a former Chairman of Morongo Council. As the 1960s progressed, small numbers of Matriculation girls attended the College for Mathematics classes, and combined with College boys in musical activities – the performance of *Carmina Burana* in 1965 was a highlight. School dances were regular events during the year and, from 1967, joint dancing classes were held.

Mr Thwaites first flagged the idea of a greater degree of academic cooperation with Morongo in 1966, at a Planning Committee meeting. Mr Ingpen also privately lobbied Mr Thwaites on the topic of co-education during the 1960s.² Lower enrolments at Campbell House prompted the College to approach Morongo in 1967 and propose a joint co-educational Lower Primary section. In 1968, a meeting of both Principals and Council representatives was proposed, and took place in February 1969 with Mr Betts, Mr Nall and Mr McArthur representing The Geelong College. Little progress was made, however, because of unspecified 'practical difficulties'.³

Mr Thwaites prepared an important paper on co-education and presented it to the Council in 1969. In it, he flagged the idea of permanent cooperation or amalgamation with a girls' school, based on three main reasons: sociological, educational and economic. Given that the normal setting in which people grow up is within a mixed family or group, he believed that co-education would be of great benefit to boarders whose social life was still very limited to specially arranged



The first Campbell House and Preparatory School girls

mixed activities, such as school dances. He argued that to get to know the opposite sex was a fundamental part of adolescence, and that a co-educational school setting would make for a smoother adjustment to the co-educational tertiary environment. In the classroom environment he argued that, especially in the Humanities, 'the contribution and insight of both sexes can contribute considerably to academic development'.⁴ He also argued strongly for an arrangement with Morongo that would provide greatly needed economic efficiency and cost savings, in an environment of increasing expenses for new equipment, facilities and rising salaries. Two uneconomical small classes could be combined, and everything from facilities to staff could be shared, maintaining variety in subjects offered. Ultimately, he wanted a sufficiently radical rearrangement to be able to make a significant contribution to the sociological and economic problems that had long been on his mind.

At Speech Night in 1969, although without actually using the term 'co-education', Mr Thwaites flagged his opinion that closer cooperation should be developed between both schools to provide some social normality. In his view, single-sex schools 'may soon prove to be an anachronism' and boys and girls really should 'work and live together under normal everyday circumstances, rather than simply meeting in their spare time, or on specially organised social occasions'.⁵

Although Mr Thwaites was ready, the College Council did not yet seem prepared educationally and emotionally for co-education. Council meetings during this period, when discussing future planning and the use of buildings, did not encompass the notion of co-education. Somewhat

frustrated, in 1970 Mr Thwaites tabled the same paper from 1969, encouraging the Council to think strategically. He also tried to move the matter forward by mentioning competitors: 'in view of the moves towards co-education at Geelong Grammar, and in many other independent schools here and overseas, is there a danger that the College will appear to be both unenlightened, and merely a follower rather than a leader in education?'⁶ However, the matter appeared again only briefly during budget preparations for 1971, and in the context of declining Lower Primary enrolments, when the Principal and Bursar examined the idea of enrolling girls but decided that this should not be done before 1973. The Senior School was full, so enrolling girls in that part of the school had not yet been discussed as a possibility.⁷ Morongo was willing, in 1971, to reopen discussions about future cooperation but Mr Thwaites was overseas during most of that year.⁸

When he returned, his report to the Council about his study leave incorporated co-education as the key matter requiring urgent discussion. In foreshadowing how the College would look in the next ten years, the Principal's focus returned to the notions that he expressed in 1969 and 1970: that a co-educational environment would foster better student attitudes and relationships. The likelihood of declining boarder numbers was recognised as part of this discussion, as faced by private schools everywhere, but for Mr Thwaites it was now a matter of educational philosophy. The school community's attention was drawn to the 'universal acceptance' of co-education overseas, on the front page of *Ad Astra*.⁹ The principle of co-education was flagged as an urgent matter for review in 1972, and during that year the Council pursued the idea of a full merger with Morongo, particularly at a meeting with representatives from both schools in August.¹⁰ At this meeting, Lucy Shaw, Morongo's Principal since 1942, stubbornly refused amalgamation with The Geelong College on the grounds that Morongo 'did not wish to lose its identity' and that anything less than amalgamation would provide 'insuperable problems in coordinating timetables and achieving close cooperation in academic work'.¹¹ Mr Neilson, who was at that meeting and also then the Secretary of Morongo Council, explains that 'Lucy Shaw always got



The first senior girls in 1976

The first female boarders in 1976. Back row: Miss R. Barkley, Suzanne Mockridge, Susan Donald, Anita Ziemer, Jane Tracey, Mrs V. Eddy; Middle row: Sue McFarland, Kim Bridgewater, Sue Emmett, Kate Hope, Virginia Cook; Front row: Wendy Abrahmsen, Annie Wilson, Sandra Gordon, Susan Gordon, Mandy Lees



what she wanted. She was revered at Morongo and nobody on the Council argued against her. Never. She was not a believer in co-education and it was very clear that Lucy Shaw was not going to have a merger.¹²

Therefore, in 1973, the College Council decided that the school would have its own 'fully co-educational future'. It was thought, originally, that co-education would begin in 1975 from Preparatory to Year 3, and in the Form 6 Business course, which was also suffering from low enrolments. This was subsequently changed to start in 1974, expanding to the whole school in 1975. The decision was announced to the College community at Speech Day in 1973. Mr McCann, the only Council member to vote against the introduction of co-education, left Council early in 1974, although he officially resigned because of other commitments.¹³ Somewhat remarkably, given the College's long history until this point as a conservative Presbyterian boys' school, three-quarters of parents and Old Collegians supported the new co-educational policy.¹⁴ For the first time, professional marketers were employed to promote new enrolments, and an Open Day was hastily put together at the end of 1973. A special discount for girl boarders was to be offered in 1976, 1977 and 1978.¹⁵ At Speech Day in 1974, the pedagogical reasons in favour of co-education were subtly explored by Mr Ingpen in an address that had been carefully crafted beforehand by him and Mr Thwaites. It began with the dramatic words 'Most education today is monumentally ineffective', and went on to explain how fundamental intellectual and physical spaces should be readdressed to create a new learning environment.¹⁶

In 1974, Mrs Sweetman taught the first five girls at Campbell House – Elizabeth Apted (1986), Catherine Black (1986), Joanne Chisholm (1986), Katherine Hatton (1986) and Andrea Patchett (1980). Two more joined them during the year. In 1975, sixteen girls attended Campbell House,

eighteen went to the Preparatory School and nineteen to the Senior School.¹⁷ It is generally believed that the College was most fortunate in the composure and positive attitudes of this first group of girls. Sarah Leach (1976) was one of the Senior School pioneers, arriving in Year 11. She recalls the 'blokey environment', the profound sense of being part of a huge cultural change, and the considerable adjustments that senior boys and some senior teachers had to make: 'I was the only girl in History and Art that year. For some boys, it was an imposition that girls were there; for others, it was the best thing they could think of.'¹⁸ The girls threw themselves into every aspect of College life, participating in combined Swimming, Hockey and Tennis Teams; playing other sports against girls from Sacred Heart, Morongo and Geelong Grammar; singing in the choir and acting in the school play; participating in social service activities and as House Prefects.¹⁹ Sixteen girls even joined the Cadet Corps in 1975. They went to camp with the boys at Anglesea in Term 1, wore the jungle greens, fired weapons and marched beside the boys. Army regulations, however, refused to allow them to participate in the main annual Cadet Camp at Puckapunyal because girls were not yet officially recognised as cadets by the army.²⁰

The appointment of female teachers was soon recognised as essential to the success of co-education. Mrs Wood had been the first to be employed at the Senior School: 'It was a very male establishment and had to change many of its attitudes to make it a place where girls could feel comfortable'.²¹ Mrs Wood 'greatly eased the pains of co-education by being so available to girls. She always made it much easier for women members of the staff to find a place and acceptance, she having been the first', commented Mr Gebhardt, who set about deliberately increasing the numbers of female teachers.²² Beth Wettenhall (1973-75), appointed to teach Indonesian, was in charge of the first girls at the Senior School in 1975. Rosemary Barkley took over this role of Senior Mistress in 1976. The two new female Physical Education Teachers, Margaret Bilney from 1975 and Sarah Bullen from 1976, as well as coaching the first girls' sporting teams, proved essential to the girls' general integration and well-being.²³ Reta Clarke was appointed in 1975 to teach English and Margaret Hoult arrived to teach Biology and Science in 1976.

Although the female student cohort in 1976 had greatly expanded to 174, girls were still outnumbered by boys by a ratio of four to one, and so retained a strong pioneering sense. A Girls' Advisory Committee was formed in 1976 to advise the school on co-educational matters,

Senior School staff, 1986 showing an increasing number of female teachers. Back row: P. Hannah, M. Keary, P. Auliciems, J. Leyshon, D. Thornton, A. Miller, H. Hood, L. Trigg; Third row: E. Manwaring, P. Goldsworthy, C. Whittle, T. Egan, R. Sheridan, M. Marker, W. Headlam, N. Fairbairn, T. Ferrier, R. Wells, A. Gibson, L. Quail, H. Mitchell, D. Carroll; Second row: R. Cummins, F. Elliott, R. Morris, G. Peel, J. Claringbold, J. Cook, H. McGann, A. Huntington, K. Hackett, D. Hynes, I. Thornton, D. Young, J. Gibson, R. Salen, W. Harris, D. Macbryde; Front row: J. Baird, R. Lancaster, S. Farrall, C. Wagstaff, J. Nelson, J. Clark, J. Palmer, J. Nelson (Director of Curriculum), P. Sheahan (Principal), D. Happell (Head of the Senior School), L. James, R. Pippett, W. Morgan, P. Cronk, S. Fisher, B. McLeod, S. Hounslow





School Council in 1989 with female councillors. L-R: M. Dowling, Prof. W. Bate, F. Marles, P. Hughes, J. Montgomery, Rev. M. Hagans, C. Menzies, Rev. J. Lavender, K. Doery, J. Kaye, G. Fielding, G. Bent, P. Sheahan, Dr M. Benjamin, Dr J. Ayerbe, G. Betts, R. Smith, B. Hale, J. Everist, A. Hope; Absent: Hon. Mr Justice B. Beach, B. Dix, K. Smit and Dr N. Wettenhall

when Council realised that the initial stages of planning had not really allowed for girls at all apart from adapting for initial boarders, and providing toilets and a separate common room.²⁴ Sue Barrett (1979), a new Form 3 girl that year, remembers being able to hold her own both academically and, in particular, through sporting involvement: 'Once the boys saw that I could contribute to helping them win sporting and debating events for our House, Coles, or our school, I was in. Pretty soon the need to compete with us started to make way for more collaboration, cooperation and friendships, and so the integration of the feminine began.'²⁵ John Nelson (1975–89), then Director of Curriculum Studies but originally Head of Mathematics, observed about co-education that: 'The first noticeable change was the increase in the numbers choosing Humanities subjects, particularly foreign languages. The English staff welcomed the girls' facility of expression, which helped the boys develop their communication skills.'²⁶ One of the thorniest issues was giving girls access to the special domain of rowing. Sarah Leach remembers how it was an issue 'for some of the boys and Masters because the rowing boats were so precious. We probably did bang their boats a bit and drop the oars in the water.'²⁷

The advent of a Girls' Rowing Team is just one example of how the development of co-education during Mr Gebhardt's period demanded considerable change from almost every aspect of the College's masculine culture. Thirty per cent of the student population by 1978 was female and this increased to 35 per cent by 1986. By 1985, however, only 20 per cent of the Senior School staff members were women, and none held senior roles. Council member Professor Weston Bate expressed his unease, stressing the importance of the example that a strength of women's numbers on the staff and on Council would give to the students: 'the College is still operating within traditional values of a boys' school with the traditional APS trappings, so that girls are being seen as mere additions: it is important that this be reviewed seriously'.²⁸

The ninth Principal, Paul Sheahan, was disappointed at the lack of women in positions of responsibility when he began.²⁹ At Margaret Lethbridge's (1988–2007) first staff meeting, she wondered: 'where are all the women? It really was a very male establishment – a boys' school

still, with girls in it.³⁰ By 1991, Mr Sheahan had begun to redress this, with two female Heads of House – Margaret O’Loughlin (1989–2002) and Janet Nelson (1978–98), and four other women in senior positions. Physical Education Teacher Anne Huntington (1985–90) was the first female Head of House (Shannon) in 1988. Ms O’Loughlin later went on to be the Head of Girls’ Boarding, and proved to be an outstanding Netball Coach. Mrs Nelson campaigned for girls to have equal recognition in the Head of the River, and ensured that the inclusive language version of the Bible was used at the College.³¹ By the end of the 1980s, girls were just as likely as boys to be named School Captain or Dux.

The first female Council member, Margaret Cameron, a Librarian from Deakin University, was not appointed until 1977 – four years after the decision to become a co-educational school had been made. By 1983, there were four women on College Council: Jill Everist, Ann Henderson, Joan Montgomery and Dorothy Pizzey. Although for some the inclusion of three more female Council members was significant, this still only represented 20 per cent. In hindsight, Mr Ingpen remarked, ‘We knew afterwards that we hadn’t appointed enough women to counsel us on what females need, educationally and physically, at the school. The composition of Council was still not right for what was being attempted with co-education – we didn’t ever appoint a Council that was truly behind the philosophy of the Principal [Thwaites] with regard to education.’³²

Co-education diversified the range of sports for everyone. Girls tried new sports such as softball, cricket and hockey. The first Girls’ Cricket Match was a social one, played against a girls’ team from Geelong Grammar in 1981. An Annual Football Match was also played by girls’ teams from both schools, beginning in 1997, and two other Girls’ Football Teams began the following year for students in Years 10 and 11. In 1982, two College Girls’ Basketball Teams first entered the local community competition. New girls’ sports of swimming and softball were introduced in 1987. Girl rowers, including stalwarts Louise Monotti (1983), Ursula Read (1983) and Tracey Smit (1983) were APS Premiers in 1981, 1982, 1983 and 1989. Four more wins have followed since then. Boys’ Rowing has continued as the most successful College sport, with thirteen Head of the River wins in the APS competition. Of the fifty-two APS Premiership titles won by the College across all sports since 1908, twenty-two have been for rowing. Boys produced Cricket Premiership wins in 1979, 1982 and 1995 but have never won the APS Athletics Premiership; the Girls’ Athletics Team has enjoyed five wins since 1995. Girls also claimed their first Hockey Premiership that year – a particularly sweet victory for Emily Gerrard (1995), a member of that team for several years.³³ The 1990s also saw highlights for Netball Premierships, with back-to-back wins in 1995 and 1996. Girls’ Tennis Teams from the College have been successful, too, with six APS titles since 1995.³⁴ A Girls’ APS Soccer Team was first fielded in 2004.

Male students’ true acceptance of co-education was put to the test when the first girls, Sarah Leach and Michelle Quigley (1976), were appointed as Prefects in 1976. Indeed, Brad Fenner (1975), the outgoing School Captain, was apprehensive about ‘how it will work out with [girl Prefects] tackling misbehaving boys’, and believed that girls lacked school spirit: ‘Yes, you are right. I do not like them. The girls have come from schools where there is, compared with the College, very little involvement, sport, pride and “school spirit”. It is up to you to somehow instil into the girls, and others, a sense of pride, a feeling for the traditions and ideals of the school.’³⁵ Sarah Leach thought that it would have been fairer to appoint joint School Captains, and remembers being told by one of the outgoing Prefects that he ‘didn’t think there should be girl Prefects at all. And I said, “what absolute rubbish!” So some of the boys were upset about it.’³⁶ Two school Co-Captains (one male and one female) have been appointed since 1998. When

Head of the River, 1982. Tracey Smit, Diana Hale, Sue Mulligan, cox Louise Monotti (on shoulders), Ursula Read and Anne Chirnside (Coach)





Above: The 1994 Girls Athletic Team warming up

Below: Girls Hockey, 1994. L-R: Megan Walter, Sarah O'Brien, Kim Dennis, Rachel Wynn, Amanda Smith, Sarah Bryant, Catriona Carswell, Andrea Rowan, Ranie Daw, Mrs C. Lean (Coach)

Sarah Henderson (1981) was appointed as School Captain from a group of eighteen Prefects, she was the first female to hold this revered position, and other students were 'conscious of that being an epoch-making decision', remembers Gideon Haigh (1983).³⁷ Sarah Henderson was also a Roman Catholic, which caused considerable concern among the more traditional Presbyterian Old Collegian constituency. Up until then, being a Roman Catholic had counted against a student in the Registrar's decisions about new enrolment applications. This was beginning to change in the early 1980s, as Roman Catholics made up 10 per cent of the school demographic, and Uniting and Presbyterian Church members only 39 per cent.³⁸ These events illustrate the particular Presbyterian conservatism to which some members of the College were still shackled.

Another more general concern that had preoccupied Principals and College Council members since the late 1970s was how to increase the number of girls enrolled in order to fulfil the commitment to the College's co-educational identity. Fortunately, co-education at the College received its greatest boost in 1995 when 130 girls transferred from Morongo, which closed at the end of 1994 when the Morongo Council realised that their debt and falling enrolments would be unmanageable.³⁹ This not only raised the number of girls from a ratio of 40 to 60 to a ratio of 46 to 54 per cent, giving the College the highest proportion of girls of any co-educational APS school, but it took the College's overall enrolment to a record 1,267.⁴⁰ The very close relationship enjoyed by the two schools over so many decades made the merger relatively easy, although the Morongo community was, of course, deeply saddened that it had to happen at all (and apparently, some people still blame the College's going co-educational for Morongo's demise⁴¹). Four Morongo teachers also transferred to The Geelong College. The Morongo site was sold and reopened as the Kardinia International College in 1996. When The Geelong College received a surplus of \$450,000 in 1997 after Morongo's affairs had been wound up, it was put towards scholarships for girls.⁴² In 2007, the College won an exemption from the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal to favour the enrolment of girls at certain levels to address gender imbalances.⁴³

True acceptance of co-education within the College community came with the appointment of Dr Pauline Turner as Principal in 1996. The move made headlines in Geelong and Melbourne, for she was also the first female Principal of any of the eleven APS schools in Victoria. Given co-education's central place in the school's mission statement – 'The Geelong College aims to offer the finest co-educational learning experience in Australia' – it became, more than ever, the central tenet to be tested during most major decisions since Dr Turner's arrival, just as the emphasis on Presbyterian Christianity was at the heart of the school's aims from the 1920s. Every aspect of the co-educational experience has been examined since Dr Turner's arrival, from the gaping gender imbalances in senior staff positions to the reassessment of pedagogical approaches for both boys and girls. From 2000, two joint Heads of Senior School have been appointed; one is responsible for student welfare and one for the curriculum, but significantly, one has been male and one female. Mrs Lethbridge was the first woman to hold the position of Head of Senior School–Welfare (2000–07).

Another area still demanding greater gender balance is the College Council. In 2008, apart from Dr Turner, only four of the total number of Council members were female. Sarah Leach, Council member since 2004, was determined to improve this situation and proposed that Council initially aim for 40 per cent female representation (with a long-term goal of equal representation), to demonstrate the school's commitment to the 'practical and symbolic value' of equality and diversity.⁴⁴



The first female Prefects of The Geelong College
Michelle Quigley (left) and Sarah Leach, 1976

