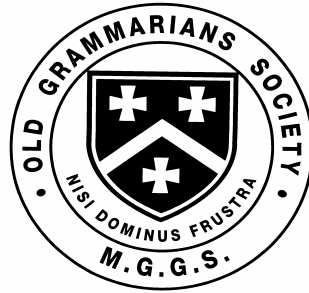


A CENTURY CELEBRATED

A short history of the Old Grammarians Society



Celebrating 100 years of the

OLD GRAMMARIANS SOCIETY

1904 - 2004

THE BEGINNING

The Old Grammarians Society was formed after Miss Mary Morris called a meeting on 15 June 1904. She became the first President together with her sister Edith until 1909, when Adele Ingram, a teacher at the School and a past student was elected.

The original name was C.E.G.G.S. Old Girls and was not known as the Old Grammarians Society until 1908. A business meeting, our equivalent of the AGM, was held in First Term, an Evening Meeting (usually a social event) in Term 2, and a special Saturday function Anniversary Day held in Term 3.

The Hockey Club was formed in 1908, by winning three consecutive State premierships, 1911, 1912 and 1913, it won the Dunraven Cup which was presented to the School. The hockey club was well supported until lack of support led to its disbandment during the eighties.

A Dramatic Club was established by Miss Edith Morris and continued on and off until 1951, when the Old Grammarians combined with the Old Melburnians to form a new club, the Melburnian Players.

The first London meeting was held in September 1909 in Marjorie Syme's sitting room in the Lancaster Hotel.

On the Anniversary Day of 1910, a telegram was received from WA. It read "Old Grammarians assembled send greetings." The President said that she "would like to suggest that our associates on the other side of the Commonwealth should unite in social gatherings at the same time as our annual reunions are held in the Mother Capital."

The register of Old Grammarians published in the *School Notes* for December 1911 lists over 250 names, addresses and marriages.

On 9 February 1916 the MCEGGS *School Notes* reported " Miss K.A. Gilman Jones met for the first time the assembled girls as their new headmistress."

During the First World War, the Society supported the Red Cross with a weekly work party held at the School. Three Old Grammarians – Margaret Brown, Jean Campbell and Isla McDonald, served overseas as nurses with the AIF. Jessie Bage went as a VAD and Frances Warren went from England to work in Serbia.

Old Grammarian representation on School Council commenced with the election of Mrs. Herbert Brookes (Ivy Deakin) in 1915.

The School Hall was opened in 1917. During the ceremony the girls sang their new School Anthem, Psalm 127, set to music by Dr A. E. Floyd.

In 1919, the War Scholarship Fund was launched to support the School, and awarded to the daughter of a fallen or disabled soldier. By 1939, thirty seven years of education had been provided for twelve girls.

THE SILVER YEARS

In 1926, the Old Grammarians Club was formed with rooms in Collins Street. The Club lasted for eight years. It closed in 1934 due to dwindling numbers during the Depression.

In 1926 Old Grammarians gathered from time to time in South Australia.

The MCEGGS women singled out as *Distinguished Old Grammarians* in a 1928 *Age* report of the Silver Jubilee, were all from the Morris era. This report included Margaret Brown

(McMahon), (enrolled at the School in 1901 and became the first Old Girl to study at Girton College, Cambridge, and had also qualified as a nurse during World War 1). She was President of the Old Grammarians Society during 1928. Dr Helen Kelsey was the first Old Girl to take a medical degree. Marjorie Herring (enrolled in 1904) handed over the principalship of Janet Clarke Hall to Enid Joske (enrolled in 1901) in the Silver Jubilee Year. The *Age* report also singled out two artists, Ethel Louisa Spowers and Eveline Syme, both of whom had studied in Paris. Muriel Stott, School Captain in 1908, and past President, was the first woman to practise architecture in Melbourne.

Although not singled out by *The Age*, another Old Grammarian of interest was Alice Anderson, born in 1897. Alice owned and ran a garage called "Miss Anderson's Motor Service", in Cotham Road, Kew.

MCEGGS History of the School, written by Gwenda Kent Hughes was published for the Silver Jubilee.

A meeting of Old Grammarians' was held in England in 1930 and regular reunions were held at Merton Cottage after the return of Miss Gilman Jones to England.

At the AGM in April 1935, there were over 250 present. A quote from School Notes No. 93 reads, "The first part of the evening was spent in jolly games and competitions and the atmosphere was very friendly and informal. Phelia Grimwade House was decorated with plants and flowers and it was very pleasant to see it filled with gaily chattering groups". The retiring President Mrs. Morton (Mabel Hicks) introduced the new President, Miss Valentine Leeper.

The Centenary Celebrations for the International Pageant were held in the Melbourne Town Hall on 20 and 21 November 1935. The Old Girls of the four Public Schools were asked to represent parts of the British Empire. The Old Grammarians chose England and Jessie Brookes appeared as a symbolic figure of Victoria on her 100th birthday. Mrs. Abbott a past student of PLC, was responsible for co-ordinating the Old Girls' Centenary Day and Service held on 28 November at Old Parliament House. Mrs. Herbert Brookes (Ivy Deakin) read a paper entitled *The School and Its Preparation for Effective Lives*.

In 1938 after 32 years as Headmistress, Miss Gilman Jones left the School.

THE WAR YEARS

1939 was a very significant year for the School. Not only did a new headmistress commence in the February, Miss Dorothy Ross, but Australia declared war on Germany on 3 September 1939.

The girls voluntarily agreed to have no prizes during wartime.

Mrs. T. W. White (later Lady White and mother of Judith Harley) became Victorian Divisional Commandant of the Red Cross Society for the next seven years. A Red Cross Emergency Company was formed and girls, parents and Old Grammarians' did voluntary work at "Stonnington" Convalescent Home. Courses in First Aid and Home Nursing were attended. A Red Cross Branch was also formed and met every Friday afternoon and a branch of the Comforts Fund was formed in 1942.

Old Grammarians' who were able to help with the entertainment of soldiers, airmen and sailors at the Combined Old Girls' Club, located at 271 Collins Street, registered with Mrs. Quinlivan (N. Lawrence).

Many Old Grammarians' served at home and abroad as nurses, doctors, members of the services, Red Cross drivers and workers, while others helped the School during evacuation. Old Grammarians' who were nurses abroad with the AIF included Barbara Haynes, Beryl

Woodbridge, Betty Duval, Ruth Young and Nancy Wilson. Margaret Mack and Dorothy Giderson, both physiotherapists, also served overseas.

During six days leave, Nancy Wilson wrote a letter back to the Society on 31 October 1940. "Mary came with me and we stayed at Turnbridge Wells. We caught a bus to Ticehurst at about 11.30, then a taxi to Merton Cottage. Miss Jones rushed out, her hands covered in flour – she was making shortbread. We had rabbit and carrot stew and potatoes roasted in their jackets and a delicious baked apple: then tea, home made rock cakes and shortbread in front of the fire. Miss Jones has a lovely little cottage."

Sadly, Kathleen Gilman Jones died on 17 September 1942, two weeks before her 62nd birthday, of burns she suffered when the primus stove in her kitchen overturned.

The Tasmanian Branch was founded in 1946 and flourished until the Secretary, Barbara Haynes returned to Melbourne to take up a position at Prince Henry's Hospital as Home Sister during the seventies.

The first Old Grammarians Golf Day was held in 1948.

THE GOLDEN YEARS

In 1950, it was decided to co-ordinate all existing Branches and to try and form others. Gladys Watson (Onians) was made Representative for Interstate Branches on the Committee. She travelled to all the states and kept in regular touch with everyone. In South Australia, Sheila Allen (Ulbrick) was responsible for the official formation of the Branch in 1951. The Geelong Branch also commenced in 1951, and the Queensland and London branches were formed in 1952. NSW followed with a meeting on 11 June 1954.

At the time of the School's Jubilee Celebrations, there were 728 Life Members at 12 guineas each and 378 Annuals at ten shillings, making a total of 1,106 financial Old Grammarians'. The book *Nisi Dominus* was published. On 9 May 1953, the stone naming Gilman Jones Hall (previously known as New Merton Hall) was laid and on Sunday 10 May, a Jubilee Service was held in St Paul's Cathedral.

A dinner organized by the Associated Public Schools of Victoria was held at Union House on 3 June 1953 to celebrate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, to which 14 Old Grammarians' attended.

A combined Parents' Association and Old Grammarians Ball was held in the Royale Ballroom on 15 July 1953. The Old Grammarians' share of the profit of 465 pounds bought a new 16 mm sound projector. The balance went to the War Memorial Appeal. The Back to School Day held in August was a great success with 400 Old Grammarians answering the roll call.

The Anniversary Day was held on 21 November with 106 present for lunch, including representatives from MLC, PLC, The Hermitage and Morongo. The President Lady Dixon (Alice Brooksbank) was the speaker and gave a first hand account of the coronation.

In 1955, Miss Ross retired as Headmistress.

Miss Sylvia Martin became acting head in 1956 until the appointment of Miss Edith Mountain in 1957. Miss Mountain was welcomed to the School with a large garden party where she met Old Grammarians', parents and dignitaries.

The Anniversary Day held on 21 November 1959 broke all records. The service was taken by Mr Ball in Ross Hall followed by 169 for lunch to hear the guest speaker, Dame Pattie Menzies.

THE DIAMOND YEARS

In 1960, due to lack of support, the Old Grammarians Committee decided that sadly, the Red Cross Company should be disbanded. The membership of the Society by then was nearly 1200 including 300 annual members.

In 1963, the School celebrated her Diamond Jubilee. A service of Thanksgiving for the past 60 years was held in St Paul's Cathedral on 13 October. 211 Old Grammarians signed the Jubilee roll at the School on 11 and 12 October, including 29 Leavers from 1903 to 1913 and 20 from 1913 to 1923.

A special edition of the School Magazine was printed.

A target of adding 1000 pounds to the capital of the Old Grammarians' Scholarship in one year was reached. The total held was 2000 pounds, giving annual interest of 100 pounds, considered an adequate amount.

A highly successful dinner dance as part of the celebrations was held at the Palais de Danse in St Kilda. Ann Price (Witaker) and Barbara Tolson (Selleck) led the Old Grammarian team on the organising committee and their share of the profit was 1278 pounds. A further payment of 300 pounds was made to School Council completing payments for all the bookshelves in the library. A new science block and library were completed in 1961.

The Jubilee Building Appeal continued and finally the new junior school building on the old Wildfell property was completed. Morris Hall was opened in 1966. The following year, 1967, The Chapel of St Luke was consecrated, and a memorial to Miss Gilman Jones in the form of the emblem of St Luke executed in silver was put in place.

THE SEVENTIES AND EIGHTIES

With changes in Society and more women in the work force, the Old Grammarians focus also changed. Representation on the League of Nations ceased, though NCWV continued with two delegates. All activities with the exception of NSW, who to this day still support the Harry Jansen Centre in the Rocks and Meals on Wheels, became School focussed.

In 1970, Joan Luff (Dunstan) retired as the Parents' Association representative on School Council. She was replaced by Jacquie Harris (Herbert) and Barbara Tolson (Selleck) was elected chair of the House Committee.

The Young Old Grammarians continued with their annual dance tradition with an *Old Grammarians Movietone Madness Masquerade*, when over 200 mad, masquerading guests attended Peanuts Gallery in the City. The event was organized by Jane Refshauge.

Miss Mountain announced her decision to retire at the end of 1974. Miss Nina Crone was appointed headmistress of MGGS in 1975.

In 1984, to celebrate the 80th Anniversary of the Society, "A Pictorial History of the School" was launched by Dame Margaret Blackwood in Ross Hall on 14 November. The sales and proceeds went to the Scholarship Fund.

Mr Gilbert Farrow drew up the Trust Deed for the DJ Ross Memorial Bursary. Mary Davis, Margaret Clark (Sanders) and Jan Wilson (Gray) were appointed Trustees.

Amanda Spring of the Young Old Grammarians organized a Fashion Parade held on 20 July 1984 in Ross Hall. 176 guests enjoyed viewing the garments designed by Sue Feldy (Kemelfield) and her mother, and modelled by seven Old Grammarians.

A triptych painted and donated by Beverly Cameron (Martorana) was dedicated during the 80th Anniversary Service. The new sports building, later called the Tom Thomas Centre, was opened.

The Old Grammarians Committee once again manned the Devonshire Teas and Desserts Tent at the School Fair.

On 26 February 1989, the Old Grammarian Memorial to Miss Edith Mountain who died on 5 December 1984, a stained glass window for the Chapel, designed and made by David Wright, was dedicated by Dean Tom Thomas.

THE CENTENARY OF THE SCHOOL

In 1990, membership of the Old Grammarians Society had expanded to nearly 1700 members.

Melbourne Girls Grammar School celebrated its centenary in 1993. A service of thanksgiving was held on 17th February in St Paul's Cathedral.

A cocktail party for about 800 guests was held on 26th February to launch the book. *Centenary Essays: 1893 to 1993* edited by Rosslyn McCarthy and Marjorie Theobald.

On 5 August, Celebration 100, The Night of the Century, was held at the Melbourne Concert Hall. Campbell McComas revived the persona of Dr A.E. Floyd, director of music at the School for over 25 years. The climax of the night was the Hallelujah Chorus from the Messiah performed by the Centenary Choir.

A Celebration of Old Grammarian Art 1893 – 1993, was opened in Ross Hall by Joan Dickson (Purnell) on 19 August. The exhibition and sale of paintings, drawings, jewellery, ceramics and other works by past and present students was organized by a committee with Margaret Clark (Sanders) in the Chair.

At the end of September, Dean Tom Thomas, Heritage Officer of the Merton Hall Foundation retired. He was replaced by Barbara Tolson (Selleck).

The Anniversary Chapel Service and Luncheon was held on 9 October with four Old Grammarians' who between them had given over 100 years of service to the Society were, made Honorary Life Members. They were Margaret Clark (Sanders), Caroline Dowling (Purbrick), Margaret McNaughton (Atkins) and Margaret Spring (Colclough).

On 14 October 1994, the Barbara Tolson Early Learners' Centre was dedicated and opened by the Right Reverend James Grant, AM, Dean of Melbourne.

Nina Crone retired at the end of 1994. A farewell function in her honour was held in the Great Hall of the National Gallery of Victoria.

On Thursday 9 February 1995, the commissioning of Christine Briggs as Principal of MGGS took place at St Paul's Cathedral by the Most Reverend Keith Rayner, Archbishop of Melbourne and President of the School Council.

The MGGS Old Grammarians Network was established in 1998 to enable former students to make contact with others in their profession or industry.

In 1999, Sue McCarthy was appointed Chairperson of the School Council. Sue, a former Treasurer of the Society, a trustee of the investment funds and a member of School Council in her own right, had extensive experience in the banking industry.

THE NEW MILLINIUM

The Old Grammarians have now reached their own Centenary Celebrations. It has been a year of wonderful reunions and happy times.

The Annual Card Day instigated by Joan Luff and continued by Sue McPhail and Jacquie Harris is an event looked forward to by many Old Grammarians.

The Annual Golf Day, for the past few years co-ordinated by Anne Williams (Stimson) and Barbara Ward-Ambler (Bult), is also keenly contested. An Old Grammarian team play at the Sun Cup Challenge each year.

Sadly the Old Grammarians versus the School Sports matches were discontinued several years ago due to difficulty in finding Old Girls able to play on a Friday afternoon.

The Society will continue to grow and change over the next hundred years.

I ask you now to charge your glasses and be upstanding to drink a toast to Old Grammarians past and present.



This short history of the Old Grammarians Society was prepared by Lorna Mitchell and Venetia Patchett (Streeton).

The information contained in this booklet has been taken from:

- *School Notes* - lent by Lorna Mitchell;
- The School Magazine;
- *Nisi Dominus*; and
- Melbourne Girls Grammar School *Centenary Essays 1893 –1993* edited by Rosslyn McCarthy and Marjorie Theobald.

