



ABBOTSLEIGH

140 Years
Abbotsleigh
1885 - 2025

Around Abbotsleigh

Semester 1 2025 Issue 70



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1885 - 2025



Cover: At the Sydney Opera House on Tuesday 20 May 2025, Abbotsleigh girls celebrated the School's 140th birthday in spectacular fashion in the fabulous Night of a Thousand Stars Concert.



Abbotsleigh acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land and acknowledges and pays respect to Elders past and present.

Around Abbotsleigh is a publication for the Abbotsleigh school community.

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Our Abbotsleigh community: celebrating 140 years of rich and vibrant history

Megan Krimmer, Headmistress



Semester 1 2025 has been a time of celebration; celebration of our incredible school, which has been so richly blessed and that has most definitely stood the test of time over the past 140 years. I wonder if Miss Clarke could have imagined what Abbotsleigh 2025 would look like when she started her school for girls in North Sydney in 1885? Society certainly has changed so much since then: in 1885, the lived experiences of people in Sydney, where cars were hardly seen, when what is now the Pacific Highway (M1) was a dirt track and when railway lines were slowly snaking their way north and south, are almost incomprehensible to us today. The Harbour Bridge was but a dream – if anyone actually had that dream back then – and as for computers, well...

However, some things do stay the same – and there have been many constants at Abbotsleigh over the past 140 years; constants that Miss Clarke would recognise and about which she would be very proud.

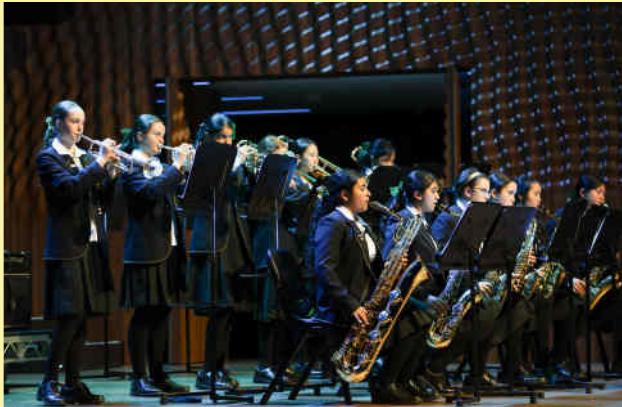
We are an academic school – we always have been and we always will be. That was Miss Clarke's dream – to provide an education for girls equal to that of their brothers or male cousins so that girls could study at university. That's exactly what the vast majority of Abbotsleigh graduates have done since the School's inception. Fortunately, in Australia (unlike England at the time), girls were able to attain university degrees. (Girls could go to university in England but degrees for women were not conferred until well into the 20th century, despite young women fulfilling all requirements for such a qualification.)

At Abbotsleigh, academia is key; and our school has always provided that, and so much more. Indeed, Miss Clarke aimed to provide an education for the 'whole

girl' and, in this edition of *Around Abbotsleigh*, education of the 'whole girl' absolutely radiates from every page. From our littlest girls in Transition, whose curiosity, creativity and innovation led to their exploration of photography and history; to incredible works of art and design; to superb music performances as well as social and emotional learning through wellbeing programs, service learning and so much more, our girls are able to follow their passions and dreams in so many areas at Abbotsleigh.

This year's Prefect theme, 'Bee Connected', has also driven new initiatives and passions, which are elaborated upon in this edition of *Around Abbotsleigh*. It inspired the launch of our DEAR program, which stands for Drop Everything and Read, and has forged even stronger bonds between Junior and Senior School girls. Also as part of our 140th birthday celebrations, we commissioned a fabulous mural from Matt Willey, the founder of The Good of the Hive. This is now complete in the Senior School grounds and shows not only the vital role bees play in our ecosystem but is also a profound metaphor for human connectedness.

The Night of a Thousand Stars, our 140th Birthday Concert at the Sydney Opera House, certainly connected the entire school and provided so many opportunities for our girls to pursue their passions. From the first moment, when our First Nations girls delivered their poignant Acknowledgement of Country through voice and dance, through to the final crescendo of celebration in Handel's *Hallelujah Chorus* performed by every girl, the audience was mesmerised by the marvellous performances of our vocalists and ensembles – jazz, brass, vocal, djembe, symphonic winds, rock band, the Junior School, Senior School and Chamber Choirs, Camerata, our Symphony Orchestra and the whole School choir. It was both a delight and privilege to have been in the audience during the Night of a Thousand Stars concert and I encourage you to read more about the exceptional performances in this edition of *Around Abbotsleigh*.



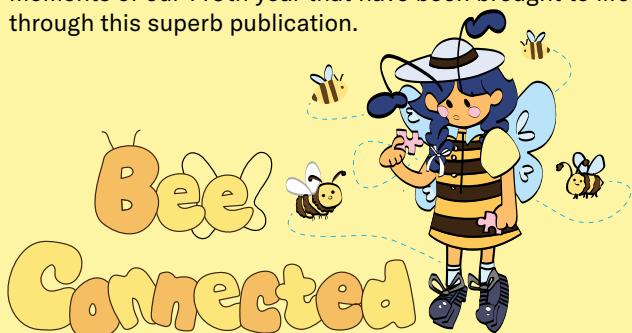
Equally inspiring are the stories of an incredible number of Abbotsleigh Old Girls who are consummate musicians. These talented women, whose passion for music was developed at Abbotsleigh, have dedicated their lives to music and shared their beautiful gift of music to so many.

As Music Prefect Grace Li said at the end of our Year 12 Showcase Music Concert: 'Music will lead you to new places. It finds its applications in art, in history and especially in STEM... did you know there is a whole field of physics called psychoacoustics? Music is the kindling of curiosity, a common language between the sciences and the humanities; it moves people, connects them, forms communities and fosters belonging. It can teach you so much, as it has taught me, about yourself, about others, about the world as it was in the past and as it is in the present.'

'Music is everywhere, and in everything. Can you hear the music?'

In addition to wonderful articles about learning, creativity and music, this *Around Abbotsleigh* highlights the fantastic opportunities we have had to connect as a community. From our magnificent Autumn Fair and the opening of our new Betty Archdale Library, to celebrating the 60th anniversary of the opening of our Chapel as well as fabulous Old Girls' reunions in Sydney, London and New York, the first semester of 2025 has been a time of celebration, connection and so much fun.

I invite you to experience some of the wonderfully joyful moments of our 140th year that have been brought to life through this superb publication.



Night of a Thousand Stars

Abbotsleigh students lit up the Opera House stage celebrating 140 years of excellence, writes Head of Music Lynette Clarke



The Sydney Opera House was pulsing with Abbotsleigh spirit on Tuesday 20 May as our community filled the Concert Hall to celebrate 140 years of empowering young women.

Students from Years 5–12 performed in two concerts, a matinee and an evening showcase of musical talent.

From the opening and very moving Acknowledgement of Country to the joyful finale of Handel's *Hallelujah Chorus*, the event honoured Abbotsleigh's rich heritage. The program featured a variety of choral and instrumental works, including performances alongside world-renowned didgeridoo player William Barton and special guest, artist singer-songwriter and Old Girl Amy Nelson (2017) who is better known by her stage name Little Green.

Abbotsleigh's composer in residence Harry Sdraulig also premiered a new work, especially written for our Con Brio Trio and Bassoon Ensemble. Aptly titled *The Hive's Caper*, this vibrant piece was inspired by the energy of the Abbotsleigh community.

More highlights of the program included the Symphony Orchestra's commanding performance of Grieg's Piano Concerto in A minor, featuring Year 10 soloist Scarlett Li on the piano, and the Jazz Ensemble's performance of Eden Ahbez's famous jazz standard *Nature Boy*, which captivated the audience with the arrangement's close-knit harmonies.

The first half of the concert closed with a feast for the senses as the Symphonic Winds, Choir, dancers and the full Senior School contributed chaotic sound and movement in Eric Whitacre's *Godzilla Eats Las Vegas*. The performance delighted the audience with its elements of theatrical surprise and dynamic frenzy.

One of the most poignant moments came during the combined Chamber Choirs' performance of Ēriks Ešenvalds' *Stars*, when the Concert Hall was illuminated solely by tealight candles. The ethereal sounds of tuned glasses and angelic singing added to the atmosphere.

The concerts concluded with a rousing rendition of the School Song *To Abbotsleigh*. Former deputy headmistress Mrs Robyn Claydon was in attendance at the matinee and received a warm ovation for the lyrics she wrote.

Headmistress Megan Krimmer summed up the night perfectly: 'The girls will treasure the memory of performing in the Opera House forever – as will I. It was an absolute triumph!'

**So many Abbotsleigh Old Girls, whose passion for music was born during their schooldays, have chosen careers in music. You can read their stories in Hitting all the right notes, from page 47.*







140TH BIRTHDAY ABBOTSLEIGH AUTUMN SCHOOL FAIR

Deputy Headmistress and Head of Senior School Victoria Rennie (Gosper, 1987) reflects on a marvellous event that showed Abbotsleigh spirit at its best

On Saturday 29 March we held a spectacular Autumn Fair. Despite the rain, the event was a resounding success, a true testament to the Abbotsleigh spirit where resilience, collaboration and joy transformed a grey, wet day into a vibrant celebration.

In a remarkable show of teamwork, the Sports Hall was transformed into a bustling marketplace. Stalls run by our student-led clubs, year groups across K-12 as well as the APA and AOGU, sold a variety of items. The magnificent ABPA Boarder Stall showcased produce and goods from across country NSW, bringing the richness of rural life to the heart of our School.

A strong contingent of the AOGU Committee proudly wore 'Old Girl' aprons to serve on the vibrant AOGU stall to raise funds for the Kathleen McCredie Award. There was something for young and old with colourful plants, fun crocheted bees, AOGU merchandise and the popular Pluck a Duck throwing game with loads of cute ducks (and bragging rights!) up for grabs.

These stalls not only highlighted the creativity and entrepreneurial spirit of our students but also demonstrated the diverse talents and strengths that make our school community so unique.

The lower carpark became a lively food hall, offering delicious treats for all tastes, while the PDCH was turned into a superb indoor concert venue, echoing with music and laughter. Performances throughout the day showcased the incredible talent of our students, creating a vibrant atmosphere that brought joy to all who attended.

The Year 12 Common Room provided a cosy retreat for browsing second-hand books and enjoying a delightful Devonshire tea, adding a touch of tradition to the day. Meanwhile, the iHub was transformed into a second-hand clothing market, reflecting our students' strong commitment to sustainability and recycling. These thoughtful initiatives not only supported School Values

but also offered something meaningful to all who attended.

One of the most exciting parts of the fair was the 'Mystery Masterpieces' exhibition, where exceptional artworks by our very own talented – and anonymous – staff and artists were displayed and sold. All proceeds were generously donated to means-tested scholarships. This spirit of giving was echoed throughout the fair, which served as an opportunity to support vital school initiatives.

The Autumn Fair was more than just an event – it was a celebration of unity, creativity and shared purpose. Every student, from Kindergarten to Year 12, their families, and our dedicated Junior and Senior School staff came together, embodying the spirit of Abbotsleigh.

As we celebrate 140 years, the Autumn Fair was a shining example of what we can achieve together. It fostered a stronger sense of community, showcased Abbotsleigh spirit and reminded us all of the joy and strength that comes from working together for a common cause. Here's to many more years of unity, growth and celebration at Abbotsleigh!





Betty Archdale Library

Coinciding with the Autumn Fair, the official opening of the new Senior School library generated much excitement, reports Old Girls Relations Assistant Rhonda Kaan (Turner, 1993)



Adding to the excitement of Abbotsleigh's 140th birthday celebrations and coinciding with the Autumn Fair in March was the official opening ceremony of the new Betty Archdale Library in the Senior School. A large crowd gathered in the Peter Duly Concert Hall to witness the event, which culminated with the unveiling of a commemorative plaque by special guests the Hon Paul Fletcher MP and Bishop of North Sydney the Rt Rev Chris Edwards.

During his address, Mr Fletcher described a library with its many books containing ideas as being 'the physical manifestation of civilisation. Somebody has laboured to express those ideas in a way that allows them to be communicated to you, the reader' he said. 'The ideas that have been developed over decades, over centuries, over millennia, that underpin the advanced and prosperous civilisation that today we are all fortunate to live in.'

While acknowledging the new Betty Archdale Library was rich with digital technology, Mr Fletcher made the point that books never reach the end of their battery life or have a downloading problem - 'so books retain some advantages which the digital technology cannot match'.

With its innovative and modern design, the new library exudes the warmth and welcoming atmosphere of the

old library with multiple levels incorporating a series of flexible, quiet and collaborative spaces combined with classrooms and an event space adjoining an expansive balcony overlooking the Top Oval.

Headmistress Mrs Megan Krimmer acknowledged there were many people to thank for the magnificent building including Council, architects, builders, project management groups as well as numerous Abbotsleigh staff.

'Thank you so much to all these people, our generous donors (parents and past parents, Old Girls and Foundation) and to so many others, who have worked so hard to ensure that our Abbotsleigh girls have a fantastic library - the centre of civilisation at Abbotsleigh,' Mrs Krimmer said.

Senior School Head of Library and Learning Enrichment Mrs Karen Seenevassen and her team were kept busy during the day with many visitors to the Autumn Fair also taking the opportunity to tour the new space.

Among the special guests were Abbotsleigh community authors who signed copies of their books shelved in the new 'Abbotsleigh Community Collection', a dedicated section for books written by Old Girls, past and current staff and parents.



THE GOOD OF THE HIVE®

Matt Willey's fabulous bee mural in the Senior School is an enduring legacy on our walls, writes Deputy Headmistress and Head of Senior School Victoria Rennie (Gosper, 1987)



‘The hive I am creating is a metaphor for us all... no matter your colour, nationality, religion, gender, age or economic status. This piece of art is an idealised picture of health to focus on as we work toward solutions.’

– Matt Willey

As part of our 140th anniversary celebrations, Abbotsleigh was honoured to welcome internationally renowned artist Matt Willey as our Artist in Residence. His visit marked a truly special moment in our school's history, as we watched a magnificent mural come to life before our eyes – an artwork that is as meaningful as it is beautiful.

Matt Willey is the founder of The Good of the Hive, a global initiative with a powerful mission: to hand-paint 50,000 honey bees around the world – the number found in a healthy, thriving hive. His work is not only a tribute to the vital role bees play in our ecosystem but also a profound metaphor for human interconnectedness.

The idea to bring Matt to our school was sparked during a visit to one of our Exchange Schools in England, Pipers Corner. Mrs Krimmer and I encountered one of Matt's murals there and were immediately struck by how deeply it resonated with our own ethos. We knew instantly that

this would be the perfect birthday gift to Abbotsleigh – an artistic bridge connecting our two schools across the globe.

Matt's mural at Abbotsleigh is more than a stunning visual addition to our grounds. It is a lasting symbol of our commitment to a better future. It reminds us that together we are stronger, we all have a role to play in connecting to a thriving community... no matter our differences, we are all part of one interconnected ecosystem. His bees, painted with care and purpose, invite us to reflect on how we can work together to build a healthier, more sustainable world.

We are proud to be part of The Good of the Hive and to have Matt's work on our walls. His mural stands as a testament to the strength we find in each other, the beauty that emerges from collaboration and the enduring values that define our community.





A magical winter's night

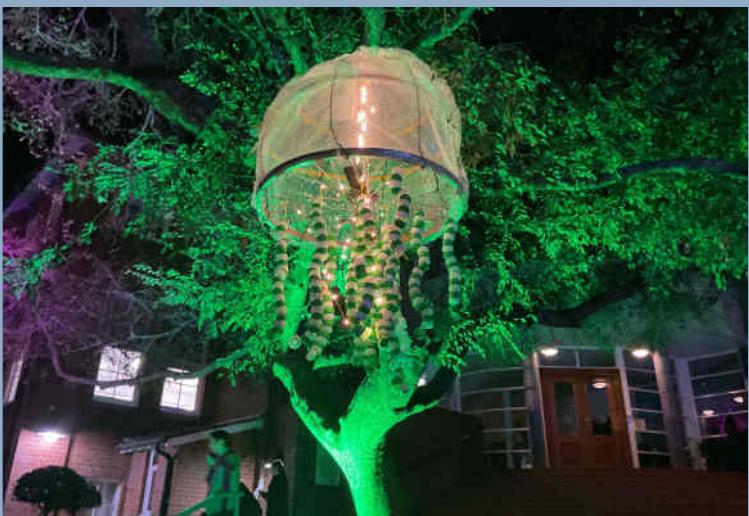
The whole school community shone at our GLOW Festival, writes Head of Design, Technology and Innovation Claire Battikha

On the evening of 16 June, our school community came together for the much-anticipated annual Abbotsleigh GLOW Festival, a spectacular celebration of student learning and creativity from the Early Learning Centre right through to Year 12. Throughout the Senior campus, visitors explored a vibrant showcase of projects and performances. The ELC and Transition students delighted with their art displays, while Year 7 students wowed audiences with imaginative English stop-motion animations. Year 9 students presented three remarkable exhibitions: Feisty Females in History; History Through Fashion garments; and stunning Visual Art light photography works. The Year 9 Christian Studies students also transformed the Chapel into a breathtaking gallery of stained-glass window designs. Adding to the innovation, Year 9 Industrial Technology and Computing Technology students invited guests to try out interactive games they had created.

A family favourite of the night was the Year 10 PASS GLOW Games in the Gymnasium, which offered fun for all ages. Meanwhile, the stage came alive with high-energy performances from our Music students, Sports Aerobics and Dance companies. Student clubs made the most of the evening to fundraise for their chosen charities, while the Prefects brought a unique spark to the night with an interactive light installation on the Oval, as well as a scavenger hunt that kept families and friends engaged across the campus.

As community members wandered through the campus, bathed in glowing coloured lights, the atmosphere was truly magical. The GLOW Festival once again proved to be a highlight of the school year, an evening that celebrated learning, creativity and community spirit on a crisp winter's night.





60 years of our beloved Chapel

Sarah Hobba, Senior Chaplain and Head of Christian Studies, reflects on Abbotsleigh's much-loved and important weekly gathering place



Background photo: Abbotsleigh Chapel, 1965

It is difficult to envision the Senior School without the enduring presence of the Chapel beside the Water Tower overlooking our daily routines. Though the completion and then dedication of the Chapel was 60 years ago, the hope for Abbotsleigh's own chapel started much earlier. After World War I and when Abbotsleigh subsequently became an Anglican Church school, a Chapel Fund was started in 1928 with contributions from Old Girls and current students. It was to be a War Memorial Chapel, in honour of the Old Girls who had served in the conflict. A building project undertaken in headmistress Betty Archdale's time, it was appropriate to dedicate the Chapel on 24 April 1965, the day before Anzac Day,

Sixty years on and many things are similar, yet much has also changed. The 60th Celebration services, held on 1 May for current students and 27 July for Old Girls and former staff, aimed to celebrate both the history of the first dedication service and the transformation of Abbotsleigh's spiritual life over the decades. The hymn 'Praise to the Lord the Almighty the King of Creation' and the reading of Psalm 122 were both part of the original service. Inclusion of our School Lesson, Philippians 4:4-9, and our School Hymn, 'Father, Lord of all Creation' (sung to the tune *Abbotsleigh*), have been later adoptions to our traditions.

Along with hymns and readings, we were guested with significant members of our community. Old Girl Mrs Margaret Sachs (Coburn, 1965) was interviewed about her memories of the Chapel as a student in her final year when it was dedicated. Mrs Sachs remembered the times before the Chapel when girls would walk to Pearce's Corner to St Paul's Wahroonga for Communion services. Later, as the chair of the Organ Fund, she recalled how the arrival of the baroque West/Pemmer organ from Germany required the closure of the Pacific Highway for its installation. She also highlighted how many Old Girls and families, including her own, contributed to the Stained-glass Windows Project. These windows were designed by Old Girl Jane Garrett (Maynard, 1983), with the first windows being in place

to celebrate Abbotsleigh's 125th birthday, and the last panes in the chancel completed by the Chapel's 50th celebration in 2015. The Address was given by the much-loved Mrs Robyn Claydon (deputy head 1973-1990; chaplain 2014) and the concluding Benediction was given by our longest serving chaplain Rev Ross McDonald (Divinity teacher 1972-1998; chaplain 1981-1998), who is pictured below.

Physical changes have occurred over the lifetime of the Chapel through the great generosity and effort of our extended community. Yet, amid decades of change, the Chapel has remained our weekly gathering place, where we hear and reflect on God's word, pray for our community and the world, and sing in praise together. As Colossians 3 says, 'Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.'

**To read more about our Chapel windows, and how the designs came about, turn to page 40 and our article, Looking back through the windows of time.*





Books, bonds and 'Bee-ing Connected'

Throughout Abbotsleigh, from our littlest girls to Year 12, we celebrate the joys of reading



This year's Prefect theme, 'Bee Connected', inspired the launch of our new DEAR program, which stands for Drop Everything and Read. We aimed to bring this theme to life by fostering stronger bonds between the Senior and Junior Schools. A key part of our role as Junior School Prefects involves regularly visiting the younger years during DEAR time to read with them. We've found these moments incredibly rewarding, and they've become a highlight of our Prefect experience. Through this initiative, we saw a wonderful opportunity to build meaningful connections between some of the oldest and youngest girls at Abbotsleigh, creating a sense of unity and shared joy across our school community.

**Sophia Bradford, Harriet Chang and Sophie Choi,
Prefects – Junior School**



Alove of reading is fostered through regular immersion in literature, and what better way to enjoy a book than to be read to by those we look up to. The Infants girls have delighted in hearing tales of adventure, excitement, friendship and success, all the while building their vocabulary and tuning into being fluent and expressive readers. Connecting with the older girls also forges another meaningful relationship for our Infants students. The power of having older role models sharing their interest in books provides a point of common connection and the opportunity to spark conversations and build unexpected friendships.

**Peita van Bussel, Acting Deputy Head
of Junior School**

'I like when we take turns reading together.'

Mia, KG



Powerful childhood memories of the joy and exhilaration of learning to read, and the way it opened up their world, inspired many girls in Years 10–12 to take part in this program. Immersing themselves in the lives of younger children has brought not only laughter and connection but also a meaningful boost to their own wellbeing.

These shared moments of joy have been deeply cherished. After each DEAR session, the older girls returned to the Senior School with a bounce in their step, smiling and chatting as they relived precious moments spent with some of our youngest students.

Beyond the social and emotional benefits, connecting through a shared love of books and reading has made this experience truly impactful and memorable.

Annette Ware, Dean of Senior College

'It made me happy to see the girls find so much joy in reading books.'

Sophie, Year 10



'Spending time with the Infants girls reminded me to cherish the simple joys in life rather than becoming bogged down with Year 12 concerns.'

Charlee, Year 12



'I like how we take turns to read the book. And they're so helpful – when I don't know a word, they help me.'

Lucy, 10



'I like when they use funny voices to read to us.'

Charlotte, KG

Courage, talent and a sprinkle of fairy dust

Peter Pan is the boy who never grew up and as Tanya Taylor, AbbSchool's Speech and Drama Tutor and director of our fabulous Junior School play observes, his story is a reminder that we should all embrace the joy of youth



Our Junior School production of *Peter Pan* was a truly magical experience. The talented cast delivered a colourful and entertaining adaptation of J M Barrie's beloved classic. The theatrical cogs began turning many months before opening night. The audition process provides a valuable opportunity for students from Years 3-6 to present on stage, develop communication skills and build confidence. In March, a record number of students auditioned – a testament to the enthusiasm and courage of the girls. In fact, this year's production featured the largest Junior School cast to date, with 68 students taking on roles across acting, dance, set design, staging and technical.

It was marvellous to witness the evolution from the creative spark at first rehearsal to the glowing brilliance of the performances. During three months of rehearsals, the girls developed a deep appreciation for collaboration and the power of effective communication. Whether working behind the scenes, at the audiovisual desk or performing on stage, every cast member played a vital role in bringing the production to life.

The actors were encouraged to shape their characters with individuality while remaining true to the timeless figures we know and love, including Peter Pan, Wendy, Captain Hook, Smee, Tinker Bell, Nana the dog, and the Crocodile. The dancers dazzled and the stage crew ensured seamless scene changes.

Talent was in abundance as the girls soaked up every challenge, layering skills in stagecraft, voice, movement and expression. One of the many highlights was a lively routine with Peter's Shadow (Caroline Kong, Year 5) and Peter Pan (Alina Chen, Year 5) combining acting, slapstick comedy and dance. This was followed by an outstanding solo performance by Caroline as Peter's Shadow.

In 1929, J M Barrie gifted all *Peter Pan* rights to Great Ormond Street Hospital in London. Since then, adaptations of the play have been welcomed. While

remaining faithful to the spirit of Barrie's magical world, it was delightful to add a few theatrical morsels. One of these was the integration of Verse Speaking, a challenging yet rewarding art form that was embraced beautifully by the cast. Presenting verse as a group, enriched with vocal modulation and expressive movement, added a dynamic layer to the performances.

Our girls exemplify empathy, respect, enthusiasm, commitment and passion. Watching them make brave, creative choices and grow through the production process was both a joy and a privilege.

We could not have put together such a spectacular show if it wasn't for the collaborative spirit of the Abbotsleigh community. Teachers and non-teaching staff, including maintenance, offered expertise in areas such as costuming, set construction, artistic design and technical support. Senior students volunteered their time to choreograph and assist with stage management. The generosity and commitment of those behind the scenes made the magic on stage possible.

Peter Pan famously refuses to grow up – yet the world around him continues to do just that. The 2025 Junior School production of *Peter Pan* is one to be treasured and whether audience members were five or 95, they were reminded to embrace the joy of youth and believe that with a sprinkle of fairy dust, anything is possible.





Technology, the arts and community through a Christian lens

Mary Santone, Transition Teacher

At the end of last term, while examining historical photographs of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, the Transition students were curious about why the Harbour Bridge was in black and white. Comparing these photos with modern, colourised depictions, they were struck by a deep sense of curiosity. The contrast between these two representations of the bridge sparked numerous reflections.

Nicole Hunt, our Learning Innovation Pre K-12 and Specialist Coordinator (STEAM), came to visit in class one day and the students, with excitement, informed her that, in earlier times, 'the world was black and white'.

Ms Hunt raised several insightful and thought-provoking questions that further deepened the students' curiosity. Her probing enquiries into the significance of black-and-white imagery led us to explore the broader implications of visual representation and the way in which colour can alter our perception of an iconic structure like the Harbour Bridge. Black-and-white photography, often evoking a sense of nostalgia and timelessness, versus the vivid colour images of the modern day, highlights the evolving nature of both the bridge's visual identity and the way we engage with cultural symbols over time.

Building on the concept of black-and-white imagery, this session introduced the integration of technology. The girls were given the opportunity to use iPads to photograph one of the gardens located on the School grounds. This was a novel experience for them, as they navigated the device and familiarised themselves with its functions. Guided by step-by-step instructions from Ms Hunt, the girls engaged with the technology, learning to capture their own interpretations of the garden through the lens of the iPad.

Ms Hunt revisited the girls' initial theories that 'in earlier times, the world was black and white'. She asked: 'If I looked up at the sky in the olden days, would it have been grey?'

Later that afternoon, I asked the girls the same question.

Aida replied: 'Black and white.'

Would there be any colour anywhere else?

Aida: 'No'

The girls were then asked, 'Do you think when God made the world, He made it in colour or black and white?'

Aida considered this and said: 'First black and then white. He turned it into colours.'

Amara thought: 'He left it black and white and then He put colour in it. It was first dark and then... His special powers coloured it up.'

Anika said: 'He started with black and then it changed blue.'

We observed that the trajectory of the girls' thinking was naturally progressing toward the concept of creation, which we used as a lens to interpret and unpack their thought process.

Ms Hunt's next visit built upon the discussions and insights the girls had already explored, guiding them to further develop their understanding and expand their perspectives on the topic at hand.

Revisiting their insights into the notion of God added colour to the world. Each week, the girls depicted various images of creation and compiled all their artwork into a cohesive digital book – a collaborative project created by the girls, celebrating the theme of Creation.

We continued to further support the girls' curiosity around black-and-white images and were honoured to welcome Old Girl Elizabeth Tomlinson (Mills, 1960) to our classroom. She shared a treasured collection of stories and photographs from her personal archive, many of which were in black and white. Her visit was a rich and inspiring experience that fed the girls' curiosity and deepened their understanding of historical imagery and life in earlier times. It also provided an opportunity



for the students to connect with a former Abbotsleigh student and gain valuable insights into the School's past from someone who experienced it firsthand.

To sum up, we had the pleasure of meeting Dr Jennifer McLaren, our Archivist. At the Senior School reception, Dr McLaren shared her extensive knowledge about the history of the girls' uniforms. The students were fascinated to learn about the changes over time and had the opportunity to see original furniture and beautifully preserved memorabilia from Abbotsleigh's past. This experience beautifully complemented the girls' explorations around the themes of black and white and the concept of change. Seeing the evolution of the school uniforms and the historical artefacts provided a tangible connection to their learning, helping them reflect on how things transform over time — both in appearance and meaning. It was a truly enriching experience, and we are grateful to Dr McLaren for her time and enthusiasm.

Driven by a spirit of inquiry, the girls engaged in a process of discovery that led them to a key realisation: change happens over time, and with innovative ideas and advancing technology, anything is possible.



Buckets, brains and big hearts: building wellbeing in Kindergarten

Emma Tuttiett and Katie Devine, Junior School Classroom Teachers

At Abbotsleigh, student wellbeing is at the heart of everything we do – especially in Kindergarten, when children are learning how to navigate their first ‘official’ year of school, friendships and the emotions that come with this journey. To support this important transition, we implement the Grow Your Mind program, a wellbeing initiative that empowers students to understand their brains, manage their emotions and build positive relationships from the very beginning of their school journey.

The program is referred to explicitly throughout the school day and has become a shared language in our Kindergarten classroom. It provides our young learners with the tools to recognise what’s happening in their brains and bodies when they’re feeling overwhelmed, excited or unsure – and helps them respond with calmness and clarity. This is especially important in the early stages of schooling, when children are developing emotional regulation and social awareness alongside academic skills.

A highlight this year has been our special Grow Your Mind Day, which was held during Term 1 Camp Week. The day was carefully designed to ‘launch’ our program, with playful, hands-on activities that brought the program’s core characters to life. These characters – such as the Guard Dog (amygdala), Wise Owl (prefrontal cortex), Memory Keeper (hippocampus) and Sifting Sooty (reticular activating system) – represent different parts of the brain and help students understand how their brains influence their feelings and behaviours.

Throughout the day, students rotated through engaging stations where they explored how to ‘calm the Guard Dog’ during moments of stress, allowing the Wise Owl to help them make thoughtful choices. They created art, played games and sang songs to make these ideas concrete and memorable. Importantly, the day reinforced how their brains affect not just how they feel but also how they treat others and build friendships.

Later, to introduce students to the concept of service learning, they took part in a lesson centred on the story *Have You Filled a Bucket Today?* (Carol McCloud), which focuses on the concept of everyone having an invisible bucket representing their emotional wellbeing. The girls reflected on how kind actions, words and empathy can ‘fill’ someone else’s bucket. As a meaningful follow-up, they each created and decorated buckets, which they then filled with thoughtful messages and gifted to special staff members throughout the School. It was a simple but powerful way to turn their learning into action and express gratitude to the important and safe adults who care for them.

The Grow Your Mind program continues to play a vital role in shaping the emotional wellbeing and learning of our Kindergarten students. By helping our girls understand their brains and behaviours, we’re laying the foundation for confident, kind and resilient learners. It’s not just about wellbeing lessons it’s about empowering our young learners to know that their brains and bodies are capable of anything.



Marshmallows, mindsets and maths

By developing flexible thinking and self-regulation, our girls are discovering that learning is not always a straight path, says Year 3 Classroom Teacher Dani Salt

Year 3 students have been developing the important disposition of self-regulation – learning how to pause, plan, make thoughtful choices and reflect on their progress. As part of Abbotsleigh's Learning Framework, this focus encourages students to build character skills that will support them throughout life and prepare them to make a positive impact and live purposefully.

From the very first week, this concept was introduced in a memorable way – with a marshmallow on a plate. Inspired by the famous self-control experiment, the Marshmallow Challenge prompted the girls to reflect on how they manage impulses, stay focused and make decisions, which set the stage for the term ahead. What followed was a valuable and entertaining insight into the management strategies students use, as well as rich classroom conversations about decision-making and planning ahead.

In Mathematics, self-regulation was woven into each unit so, throughout the term, students used their Self-Regulation Journals during lessons to support their growing awareness of how they learn best. These journals encouraged them to set goals, select their task level using 'chilli challenges', plan their approach and reflect on what helped them succeed. Most importantly, students considered what to do when things didn't go to plan. By developing flexible thinking, they began to see that learning is not always a straight path but one that involves ups and downs, choices and changes.

Whether estimating and measuring classroom objects, comparing areas in playground designs or solving word problems involving fractions, students were challenged to take ownership of their learning. Most tasks were designed with choice, scaffolding and reflection in mind, allowing girls to build confidence in their selected strategies and develop greater independence. It was inspiring to see how many responded to this autonomy with focus and a strong sense of personal responsibility.

A highlight for many was the chance to talk about what makes learning meaningful to them through 'Maths & Me' reflections with peers. These conversations helped students connect their learning to the real world and understand the value of effort during every learning experience.

Looking ahead to Term 3, the development of self-regulation will remain a strong focus as it is incorporated into other areas of the curriculum. By building these habits now, we are helping our Year 3 students to become not only self-aware learners but thoughtful and capable individuals who are prepared to contribute positively to the world around them.



Celebrations of creativity and inclusion

Studio A Days are about breaking down barriers in the arts world and challenging conventions, writes Senior School Visual Arts Teacher Lauren Barlow



This year, Abbotsleigh proudly launched a new initiative called Studio A Day – a vibrant, workshop designed to inspire creativity and celebrate diversity through the arts. Held once each term, this two-hour workshop is open to enthusiastic Years 7 and 8 students who volunteer to participate in a unique artistic experience.

The program is run in collaboration with Studio A, a Sydney-based supported studio that empowers professional artists with intellectual disability. Studio A's mission is to break down barriers in the art world by providing artists with access to education, professional development and opportunities to thrive creatively and economically.

Each term, Studio A brings a different artist to lead the workshop, offering students a fresh perspective and a chance to engage with diverse artistic styles and stories. So far, we've had the pleasure of welcoming two incredible artists: Meagan Pelham and Emily Crockford.

To launch the initiative, Emily Crockford brought her bold, vibrant energy to the classroom. Famous for her use of bright colours and intricate patterns, her session was a joyful explosion of creativity. Students joined Emily in a collaborative installation that saw a flock of vibrant, colourful birds meeting on a tree.

Meagan Pelham, known for her whimsical and romantic artworks, led students through a dreamy, creative session inspired by her love of fashion design. Her gentle guidance and imaginative flair encouraged students to explore their own designer voices to create tote bags adorned with beads and love!

The excitement peaked when Thom Roberts joined the initiative and led his Funny Faces workshop. At the time, Thom had a solo exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra. He collaborated with the girls to explore all the magical ways we can explore the idea of identity.

Studio A Day is more than just an art workshop – it's a celebration of inclusion, creativity and the power of self-expression. It gives our students the opportunity to learn from artists who challenge conventions and redefine what it means to be a professional in the creative industries. Beyond the wild collaborations, the students engaged in nuanced and sometimes challenging conversations around access and disability, encouraging them to deepen their sense of empathy and connection.

We look forward to welcoming more Studio A artists in the coming terms and continuing to build a culture of creativity and respect within our School community.



Exploring careers in Technology

Claire Battikha
Head of Design, Technology and Innovation

Year 10 Computer Technology and Year 12 Software Engineering students embarked on an exciting excursion to the University of Technology Sydney to explore the world of technology and future career options. Engaging sessions covered various career paths, industry trends and the latest technological developments. With nine different sessions available, students gained valuable insights into university life and the diverse opportunities within the technology sector.

During breaks, the girls had the chance to visit exhibitor stands and meet with company and university representatives. These interactions provided them

with first-hand information on courses, degrees, work experience and internships. Hands-on demonstrations of cutting-edge technology further enriched their experience, sparking curiosity and inspiration.

A highlight of the day was hearing from keynote speakers who shared their personal journeys in the tech industry. Their stories of innovation and perseverance motivated students to consider their own paths in this ever-evolving field.

The excursion to UTS equipped students with the knowledge to make informed decisions about their future in technology.



Design Day 2025

Claire Battikha
Head of Design, Technology and Innovation



To kickstart an exciting year in Design, we proudly hosted our annual Design Day 2025 – a celebration of creativity, innovation and hands-on learning. We began with a Women in Design breakfast, where students had the opportunity to connect with some of the industry's most inspiring female leaders. We were honoured to welcome Dr Sara Padgett Kjaersgaard, Director of the Landscape Architecture Program at UNSW; Old Girl Edwina Stuart (Wotherspoon, 1996) and accomplished landscape architect with her own consultancy; and Beatrice Ong and Johanna Wang, both Project Leads at AJC Architecture. Their stories of diverse career paths and achievements offered our students invaluable insight into the world of design.

The day continued with a jam-packed schedule of workshops and presentations across multiple design disciplines including Fashion, Architecture, Graphic Design and Product Design. Years 9-11 Design students enthusiastically engaged in interactive sessions designed to deepen their knowledge and develop their practical skills. One highlight was Cavalcade, an organisation with a collection of original historic gowns and accessories, who brought history to life by sharing

an incredible fashion archive, featuring real garments from different eras (some of which are pictured below). Students had a rare glimpse into the evolution of style and design through the decades, learning how history continues to inform contemporary fashion. Meanwhile, digital textile designer Bella Buzzese guided our Year 11 students in creating their own digital repeat patterns. Her creative process and professional insights allowed students to explore the possibilities of textile design in the digital age.

Architecture came alive through a collaborative 'design a project in a day' session led by Dr R Luna, Senior Lecturer at the University of Technology Sydney, Principal at PRAUD and Director of the Infra-Architecture Lab, alongside practising architect Jenna Rowe. Using ArchiCAD software, students designed and produced their own architectural models, merging technical skill with individual vision and creative thinking.

The day concluded with a captivating session by Vert Designs, offering a behind-the-scenes look at life as a product designer. Students learnt about the journey from concept to creation, sparking fresh ideas and ambitions.



Winged words

It is an honour to be selected for the Young Writers Showcase anthology and Georgia Black, Head of English, congratulates Year 12 student Audrey Kennedy on this fine achievement

At the 2024 HSC Young Writers Showcase presentation, held at Parliament House in May, award-winning comedian, actor, writer, director and guest speaker Jenna Owen (*Nugget is Dead, Optics, Eden*) revealed that she views creativity as 'non-linear' and that her career trajectory was launched thanks to her own Year 12 English Extension 2 Major Work journey. Jenna's composition was selected and published in the 2013 Young Writers anthology and she cited this as a life-changing and affirming milestone – one where she felt seen.

So what an honour it is that one of our Abbotsleigh girls, 2024 graduate Audrey Kennedy, has been seen, and recognised, for her sublime HSC English Extension 2 creative non-fiction Major Work *Fabella: An Age of Winged Words*, which has been selected for inclusion in the Young Writers Showcase anthology. Audrey's Major

Work is one of 19 selected from 1500 candidates in NSW and she is among the first group of HSC students to also be published digitally.

Audrey's published composition is the celebration, not only of her flair, originality and beautiful lyricism, but of her dedication to her craft, extensive and deep reading and research, patience and willingness to experiment with ideas. We are over-brimming with pride, excitement and joy for Audrey and for this extraordinary achievement and acknowledgment of her exemplary talent.

'There is a presence to ancient texts, a tangibility to their mystery and a strength. To me, it makes them appear something like monuments. The edges of vellum and papyrus caressed by time, like the wearing of marble columns. Clay tablets become stone, warm richness providing bedrock of stories, layers deep, many of which lie waiting to be discovered.'

From *Fabella: An Age of Winged Words*
by Audrey Kennedy



Empowering voices: First Nations Artists' Exchange at Abbotsleigh

Lauren Barlow, Senior School Visual Arts Teacher

In a powerful celebration of culture, creativity, and connection, Abbotsleigh is celebrating its inaugural First Nations Artists' Exchange, a year-long initiative designed to foster mentorship and artistic collaboration between First Nations students and leading First Nations artists. Rooted in the rich traditions of storytelling and visual expression, the program offers a transformative space for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls to explore identity, share their voices and build community through art.

The first year of this program saw a dynamic partnership with emerging contemporary artist Tiarna Herczeg, a Kuku Yalanji/Kuku Nyungkul Warra woman with Hungarian heritage, living on Gadigal land. Weaving inspiration from these diverse landscapes, her artistic practice is deeply personal and intuitive. She paints without preconceived notions, guided instead by feeling and ancestral memory. Tiarna's collaboration with Abbotsleigh's Indigenous students has been mutually inspiring and impactful for both the artist and the students, creating meaningful opportunities for dialogue and creative exchange. The students' chance to collaborate with a young Indigenous female artist is a powerful moment of representation and inspiration. It allows them to see themselves reflected in a creative

and professional space, affirming that their voices and stories are valued. Through shared cultural experiences and artistic methods, students were not only empowered to express their identities but also encouraged to envision the possibilities of their own futures. The connection fosters confidence, ambition and a deeper sense of belonging, showing that their heritage is not only something to honour but also a foundation for growth, leadership and creative success.

The initiative began with a design project for the 2025 First Nations Round of Sports jersey, a symbol of pride and representation within the school community. In a workshop led by Herczeg, students brainstormed and sketched imagery that reflected their personal journeys – from distant communities to the shared experience of boarding life at Abbotsleigh. Themes such as travel, sisterhood and the natural environment, including the Blue Gum trees on campus, were woven into the design. Herczeg then refined these ideas into a final jersey that honours both individual stories and collective identity.

Designed as an artwork and then applied to fabric in a range of styles, the students' voices played an important role in the final selection of placement and colour. On 22 May 2025, Abbotsleigh's First Football team wore the jerseys during the Pymble Ladies' College First Nations Round of Sport. The striking design represented the energy of the initiative and was worn proudly by the Abbotsleigh sportswomen.

Along the journey, students were invited to create T-shirt designs for a fundraising initiative, allowing them to express similar themes through their own artistic styles. This reciprocal exchange not only nurtured creativity but also empowered the girls to take ownership of their cultural narratives. The exchange has also spotlighted the talents of Abbotsleigh students Amaya Sloane-Wood (Year 8, 2024) and Chloe Nicholls (Year 12, 2024), whose





paintings – *Connections and Threads of Sisterhood* – capture the essence of community and cultural pride. Their works depict Abbotsleigh as a meeting place where students from diverse backgrounds converge, support one another and celebrate shared experiences. These paintings became the foundation for the NAIDOC Week T-shirt fundraiser, led by Demi Green and Lexie Wilson (Year 11). Held last October, the fundraiser invited students and staff to wear the T-shirts in allyship, with proceeds supporting future Pay It Forward Yalari scholarships. Accompanied by a BBQ and bake sale, the event was a vibrant celebration of unity and student agency. The T-shirts, more than just fashion items, became symbols of cultural pride and storytelling – each design carrying the voices and experiences of the young artists.

A highlight of the program was the students' visit to Herczeg's solo exhibition, *Through Coloured Glass*, at Curatorial+Co in Woolloomooloo. Welcomed with a private preview and behind-the-scenes tour, the students engaged with gallery curator Claire Field and explored works by other Indigenous artists. The experience encouraged reflection on the importance

of storytelling and voice in art, and how personal perspectives shape creative expression. Herczeg's talk offered insight into her journey as a young Indigenous woman navigating identity and belonging, resonating deeply with the students.

Throughout the year, the First Nations Artists' Exchange has demonstrated the power of art to connect, heal and inspire. It has provided a platform for students to explore their heritage, express their identities and contribute meaningfully to the School's cultural life. The initiative also reflects Abbotsleigh's commitment to fostering inclusive and respectful spaces where Indigenous voices are heard, valued and celebrated.

Looking ahead, the program aims to deepen these relationships and expand opportunities for creative collaboration in its second year and beyond. The program has drawn to light the power of mentorship and the First Nations Artists' Exchange will continue to build a legacy for First Nations students as they contribute to and shape the present and future cultural profile of Abbotsleigh.



Our boarding team

Our new Head of Boarding Katie White (Craig, 1999) sat down with each of our dedicated Boarding Coordinators to get to know them a little better



Our Boarding Coordinators play a vital role in the daily life of our boarders. Each coordinator is responsible for the care and wellbeing of the girls in their house, helping to foster a sense of community, connection and support. Whether it's offering guidance, sharing a laugh or simply being a steady presence, these staff members are at the heart of what makes boarding at Abbotsleigh so special.



Shae Rodden

From surfing the world to supporting our youngest boarders

Shae Rodden's path to Abbotsleigh has been as adventurous as it is heartfelt. Raised on the Sunshine Coast, Shae spent her younger years chasing waves around the globe – from Indonesia to Papua New Guinea – as well as snowboarding in Europe and even cruising the Amazon. But it was a move to Sydney for university and some persistent encouragement from her educator husband that eventually led her to realise her passion for working with young people.

Now the Year 7 Boarding Coordinator in Read House, Shae has found a role that blends her nurturing spirit with her sense of adventure. 'This job honestly feels like my dream role,' she says. With three energetic daughters under 10, a golden retriever named Gus and a household filled with sport, Shae is no stranger to life's fast pace. Yet she deeply values the slower moments, too: coffee at sunrise, long walks and a quiet afternoon with a nostalgic movie.

New to boarding, she's already felt the deep sense of community that makes Abbotsleigh so special. 'From day one, everyone has been so welcoming,' she says. 'It really does feel like a place of belonging.' Her hope for the girls she supports is simple yet profound: 'That they feel seen, supported and take lasting friendships with them beyond the school gates.'



Georgie Sharman

Gutsy, grounded and always exploring

Georgie Sharman brings a fearless, down-to-earth energy to the Abbotsleigh boarding team. Raised in South Australia's wine country – first in Coonawarra, then on a farm in Kalangadoo – she knows what it means to leave home young for school, having boarded five hours away from home in Adelaide. 'That experience shaped me,' she says, 'and it's why I feel so connected to this work.'

After time spent in hospitality, wine and events, Georgie took a leap, true to her motto: 'No risk, no story.' That leap brought her to boarding, where she thrives in the vibrant, unpredictable rhythm of daily life with the girls. Outside of work, she's often off-grid: hiking, surfing, road-tripping or camping. Her beloved dachshund Winnie is currently living her best life on the family farm, rounding up sheep alongside two working dogs, often with more success.

At Abbotsleigh, Georgie's approach to boarding is all heart and humour. 'I love watching the girls grow, seeing them build confidence, chase opportunities and form lifelong friendships.' Her perfect day off includes Japanese food, a sunny nap with Winnie and a binge of *New Girl* or *Bones*.

And her hope for the girls? 'That they leave knowing there's no one right path and their story, however it unfolds, is already extraordinary.'



Victoria Small

Food, family and the beauty of simple moments

Victoria Small's journey with Abbotsleigh has had more than one chapter. 'Mrs Krimmer calls me a boomerang,' she laughs, 'because I keep coming back.' And with good reason, boarding gives Victoria the chance to share life's joys and challenges with young people in meaningful, day-to-day ways.

With grown-up children of her own and a golden retriever who loves long walks, Victoria brings a motherly warmth and wisdom to Wheeldon House. She's known for her incredible cooking, especially the night she made dinner for 26 girls, and her ability to brighten any room with a kind word or quick smile. 'It's the little connections, like being greeted in the hall or sharing a laugh, that make it all so special,' she says.

Outside of school, Victoria enjoys relaxed days filled with tea, home cooking and conversation around the table. She also loves spending time with her adult kids, whom she affectionately calls her 'kidults'. Her hope for boarders is that they leave not just with academic achievements but with confidence, kindness, life skills and the deep knowledge that they matter. 'They are so much more than their marks and yes, clean sheets really do count.'



Deborah Burasiddhi

Quietly impactful and deeply dedicated

Deborah Burasiddhi didn't expect to work in boarding but it turns out she's very, very good at it. After pausing her education degree in 2014 and returning from a semester abroad in Montreal, Deborah applied to be a boarding resident assistant to gain some independence and see whether she enjoyed working with teenagers. She hasn't left since.

Now a trusted and steady presence in Wheeldon House, Deborah is known for her calm, thoughtful approach and dry wit. She thrives on the diversity of boarding life. 'Hearing stories from all over Australia really broadened my perspective,' she says. 'I've learnt so much just by listening.'

Outside work, she makes regular visits to her parents and their dog, Percy, and finds peace in simple routines. A self-described introvert, Deborah recharges by unplugging, crafting intricate pop-up cards and indulging in her surprising love of *Top Gear*, *The Grand Tour* and British sitcoms. 'I can't drive and I have no interest in cars,' she laughs, 'but I'm obsessed.'

Deborah's most meaningful moment? Watching the first group of girls she supported graduate. 'You can't help but feel proud,' she says. 'I just hope they leave feeling grateful for the experience, for their friendships and for the people who helped them along the way.'

Kylie Rogers

A life of purpose, presence and positivity

Kylie Rogers brings a lifetime of experience and a joyful, nurturing spirit to the boarding house every single day. Raised in Parramatta with a backyard bordering James Ruse Agricultural High School, Kylie remembers watching cows graze from her window and receiving fresh produce over a fence pulley system. That early connection to nature and people has stayed with her.

Her career has taken her through every life stage: early childhood, primary and high schools, aged care, funeral services and adult education. She's been a live-in nanny, a White Lady and a corporate trainer. But the heart of it all is simple: she loves helping people grow.

Today, she's a cherished presence in the boarding house, known for her morning greetings, heartfelt goodnights and unwavering encouragement. 'Every night, I remind the girls they are loved, valued and precious beyond measure,' she says.

One memorable moment? A student once told her that hearing her snore at night reminded her of her grandfather and helped her sleep. 'It still makes me laugh,' she says.

Kylie is also an avid dancer, Zumba lover and sunset chaser. Her perfect day off includes a morning walk, brunch, a phone chat with her grown-up kids and a well-earned nap. She's a devoted coffee drinker, a Lifeline Book Fair regular and starts every day with scripture and gratitude.

Her deepest hope for boarders? 'That they leave with confidence, compassion and a strong sense of self. That they know they are enough and that they can lead lives full of courage, integrity and love.'

A celebration of connection, care and community

Head of Boarding Katie White (Craig, 1999) reflects on Boarding Week in Abbotsleigh



Every May, boarding schools across Australia come together to celebrate National Boarding Week – a special time to honour the resilience, friendships and support networks that make boarding a true home away from home. Organised by the Australian Boarding Schools Association, this week celebrates the unique experiences and strong bonds formed by boarders. This year's theme, 'Threads of Connection', highlights how these bonds weave our boarding community into a close-knit family, holding us together like the threads of a tapestry.

A week of energy, insight and friendly rivalry

The week began on Monday 12 May with a spirited lunchtime touch football match, where the boarders triumphed 7-1 over the day girls, kicking off the celebrations with enthusiasm and teamwork.

On Tuesday, boarders had a special breakfast with the staff who support them every day. It was a meaningful time of sharing stories and gratitude, strengthening the ties that make boarding life so supportive. Later that day, a special assembly gave the wider school community a glimpse into 'a day in the life' of a boarder, showcasing the routines, friendships and unique moments that make boarding so special. That afternoon, the day girls won a closely contested football match, adding to the friendly rivalry that brings the school together.

The competition continued on Wednesday 14 May with a hockey match, where the boarders reclaimed victory, energising the week's spirit of camaraderie and connection. Later that day, the day girls enjoyed a relaxed afternoon tea in the boarding houses, a lovely opportunity for both groups to mingle and share stories.

Throughout the week, boarders proudly wore their distinctive hoodies, visibly celebrating their community spirit across the campus.

Gratitude and giving back

The celebrations culminated on Friday 16 May with the Boarders Charity Barbecue. The boarders took charge as chefs and hosts, grilling sausages and serving the school community while filling the plaza with joyful country tunes. Their generous efforts raised more than \$1,000 for the Royal Flying Doctor Service, an organisation close to many boarders' hearts given their rural backgrounds.

More than just a place to live

Beyond sports and fundraising, Boarding Week at Abbotsleigh is a powerful reminder of the life-changing connections boarding offers. It celebrates the diversity of our community – girls from rural towns, from overseas and from Sydney – coming together to form lasting friendships and shared memories.

As the week closed, the 'Threads of Connection' theme resonated deeply. These bonds form the fabric of Abbotsleigh's boarding: life, strong, supportive and woven with kindness.



Threads of Connection

Victoria Small, Christian Studies Teacher and Boarding Coordinator in Upper Wheeldon House, reflects on the year so far



In Semester 1, the Year 12 Boarding House was filled with many memorable moments, shared experiences and deepening connections. The sense of unity and camaraderie has grown stronger, with the Boarding Week theme, 'Threads of Connection', woven through everything the girls do, as well as the Prefect theme, 'Bee Connected'. We are working to keep these connections growing – from daily routines to milestone celebrations.

One of the highlights of Boarding Week was the arrival of the Year 12 jerseys, which added to the girls' excitement and pride of being leaders in the house and school.

Another standout moment in this semester was a special home-cooked dinner prepared for the girls, which brought everyone together for a warm, delicious meal that felt like home. Birthday celebrations also brought joy, with homemade cakes marking everyone's special day and some very loud renditions of *Happy Birthday!*

The semester was not without its challenges. Some illnesses and injuries tested resilience but the kind support among boarders was strong. Laughter was a constant, though there were a few tears, too – which is natural and to be expected in a big year.

Sport played a huge role, with most girls actively involved in weekly training and games, contributing to a lively, energetic atmosphere.

Evening conversations often turned to topics like formal dresses, dates and the excitement (and nerves) about what comes next. Plans for university, gap years and college interviews have been hot topics, with everyone beginning to picture life beyond school. Amid all the social and emotional moments, there has been a strong commitment to all things academic and to creativity. Whether it's study sessions, art projects or performances, the effort and passion among Year 12s has been inspiring.

There was a great 'compulsory fun' night with games and puzzles and painting. The girls have embraced knitting to support 'Wrapped with Love', which proved a great relaxation activity during the last assessment block.

As these Year 12s move into the final stretch of their school journey, the connections made this semester – and the memories created – will remain with us all, girls and staff, long after the girls have left Upper Wheeldon.



Something in the water?

Among the tight-knit boarder community is a cluster of cousins and friends, who all hail from Walcha, NSW, writes Old Girls Relations Assistant Rhonda Kaan (Turner, 1993)



Boarders who call Walcha home, left to right: Phoebe Fenwicke, Liv Mulligan, Franki Nivison, Sacha Macarthur Onslow, Jemma Warden and Tempe Macarthur Onslow

Abbotsleigh boarders hail from across the country – and the globe – but a cluster from the Northern Tablelands has us wondering: ‘Is there something in the water at Walcha?’ Located about halfway between Sydney and Brisbane, Walcha is a small, culturally rich town filled with charming historic streetscapes and abundant public art. The area boasts spectacular gorge country alongside highly productive undulating pastured lands, with the local superfine wool acknowledged as some of the best in the world.

Similar in size to the total number of students at Abbotsleigh, Walcha’s population of 1,369 ‘drops’ during term time with six boarders – all cousins – at Abbotsleigh and, over the next few years, four more siblings may join them.

The Nivison family has four first cousins boarding: sisters Tempe (Year 12) and Sacha (Year 10) MacArthur Onslow and their cousin Jemma Warden (Year 12) follow in the footsteps of their Old Girl mothers Rebecca Macarthur Onslow (Nivison, 1993) and Katrina Warden (Nivison, 1991) respectively and aunt Lisa Nivison (1997). Cousin Franki Nivison (Year 7), whose two sisters plan to join her in the next few years, is the daughter of Jock Nivison.

It was Rebecca’s positive experience and the School’s excellent academic reputation that was the reasoning behind sending her girls to board at Abbotsleigh. ‘I had a great experience,’ she said, ‘including making lifelong friends, and I really wanted the same for my kids,’ she says. ‘It’s nice to have them all there together. Everyone is having a great time!'

However, Rebecca notes that these days the boarders have a lot more organised activities, such as whale watching and attending professional NRL and AFL games – and that the facilities had also improved.

‘It’s amazing what they tell me they are doing on the weekends,’ she says, ‘and of course, Wheeldon Boarding House is better than anything anyone has ever seen!'

Rebecca’s daughter Tempe agrees, saying there is always something to do. ‘I love being around my friends all the time, there is always someone to talk to and laugh with, and always someone to support you and be there for you,’ Tempe says.

‘Mum has told me so many funny stories from when she was at Abbotsleigh, she has made lifelong friends there and she told me to make the most of boarding while it lasts!'

Jemma says her boarding experience has allowed her to form new friendships and take part in experiences she would never have imagined. ‘Boarding has given me a second family,’ she says. ‘I now have more than 20 sisters and we share a bond that feels truly special.

‘Abbotsleigh offers such a broad and inclusive environment and I’m incredibly grateful to be part of that. It has made my experience here even more enriching and meaningful.’

New to boarding this year, Franki says the best advice her aunts had given her was to get involved and try new things. ‘It helped me make friends quickly and feel part of the community,’ she says. ‘It feels like a big sleepover and there’s always someone to talk to or hang out with.’

The girls had some great advice for any day girls and their families who may have the opportunity to visit Walcha. Olivia Mulligan, who is in Year 8 says, ‘I would suggest they go to Apsley Falls and do the bush walk which goes around the gorges and Apsley Falls itself.’

Jemma recommended exploring the many locally owned shops. ‘These businesses offer fresh and locally sourced produce that you just can’t find in a big city like Sydney.’

While there is no doubt the girls hold their tight-knit regional community close to their hearts – ‘I love how close the town is and how everyone knows everyone,’ says Phoebe Fenwicke (Year 11) – they also know that, as boarders, they are part of a special sisterhood.

‘What I really enjoy the most is the close relationships between all the boarders and that it makes you feel like you are a part of a massive family,’ says Olivia.

Empowering young women through education

Dr Jennifer McLaren, Archivist, Thurles Thomas Archives

Over the past 140 years, Abbotsleigh Old Girls have achieved, influenced and led in myriad fields. They have raised their voices as activists and politicians and dedicated their working lives to life-saving scientific research. Old Girls' influence has been felt in homes, families and personal networks as well as in the public arena. Our School's founder Miss Marian Clarke exhorted her students to commit themselves honestly and earnestly to their work to ensure their contribution to the new Australian nation. She also instilled in them (quoting Elizabeth Barrett Browning) that it was by working that women prevent dropping 'at once below the dignity of man'.

Miss Clarke arrived in New South Wales in 1884 determined to put into practice the type of educational environment that had shaped her – that is, to provide girls with a secondary level education to enable them to enter tertiary institutions. To equip girls with the skills to succeed beyond school, Miss Clarke educated 'the whole girl' – an ethos that remains central to Abbotsleigh today. Abbotsleigh girls have always combined academic rigour with what we today call co- and extracurricular activities. In the early days, these activities included woodwork, gymnastics, art and music.

Miss Clarke completed her own education as one of the first women to sit the Cambridge Higher Local Exam, with honours in Political Economy, History and Logic. This exam was a certificate, not a degree, but it was a significant achievement; Cambridge did not offer degrees to women until 1947. Her teaching experience included four years at the progressive Manchester High School for Girls, which was known for its ambitious academic curriculum. The first students at Abbotsleigh were taught a range of traditionally 'masculine' subjects, including Greek, Latin, Maths and Natural Sciences. Miss Clarke relented somewhat when it came to

Geometry: 'Parents were most kind and sympathetic, but they were inclined to interfere in the curriculum and thought... I arranged for Geometry to be taught in every class... I had to give way and "the unnecessary subject" was taught to the few only.'

Keen to establish her students as academic achievers, Miss Clarke sent seven girls to sit the Junior Public Examination in 1886. They all failed. One of those girls recalled, 'We all went to school feeling very sad and ashamed of ourselves. Miss Clarke... was terribly disappointed. We were given strawberries and cream to cheer us up.' After much hard work, they re-sat the exam in 1887 and all passed.

Miss Clarke would not have called herself a feminist but she followed in the footsteps of a cohort of English feminists involved in women's education in the 19th century. She was a foundation member of the Teachers' Guild in Sydney and the feminist Women's Club. Her propensity for connection was fostered in Abbotsleigh graduates when she established the Abbotsleigh Old Girls' Union in 1908.

Teaching styles, curricula and frameworks may have changed over the years but Abbotsleigh's educational philosophy has remained remarkably constant: empowering young women through education to co-operate, compete and lead, and take their place at the table with confidence. Across public service, media, diplomacy, the military, medicine, literature, law, art, sport, music and more, Old Girls have taken their secondary education and used it as Marian Clarke hoped – to enter tertiary study and fulfil their potential. Perhaps she would be most proud of the scores of Old Girls who have followed in her footsteps to teach successive generations of girls, from kindergarten to university. After all, educating girls is the key to changing the world.



Carpentry at Abbotsleigh, 1865



Marian Clarke with her dog Nero, 1909

Bequests to Abbotsleigh

Your will, Your way

A bequest to Abbotsleigh is an investment in independent young women.

You can speak confidentially to us about how you create a will, what kinds of gifts you can leave, and if you'd like them to go towards a specific cause such as Indigenous or needs-based scholarships, a prize, or school improvements.

No matter the size of your gift, Abbotsleigh is deeply appreciative of bequests from members of our school community.



Further information about gifts in wills can be found at:

abbotsleigh.nsw.edu.au/giving/gifts-in-wills

A philanthropic passion for education, spirituality and relevant philosophies

Ever since her first successful fundraising initiative for the Junior School Library at 10 years of age, Old Girl Dr Greta Archbold (Brown, 1967) says she has yearned to give back. Here she speaks with Old Girls Relations Assistant Rhonda Kaan (Turner, 1993)



Born in Wauchope in country NSW, Dr Greta Archbold commenced at Abbotsleigh as a nine-year-old boarder and says it was the 'genuine happiness' she gained from directing, producing and promoting her first concert to raise money for her school that sowed a philanthropic seed that thrives to this day.

Throughout her life Dr Archbold has been a prominent figure in fundraising for various charitable organisations, such as the Save the Children Fund, Red Cross and the Asthma Foundation. She joined the Art Gallery of NSW as a volunteer before going on to become a Patron and a Member of the Foundation.

Today, she is an entrepreneur, author and artist who values working with the community and has contributed through volunteering in the arts and church life for decades, and she continues to give back to Abbotsleigh.

'The call to bequest was not questionable, it was a must-do project,' she says. 'In 1996, I believe I was one of the few Abbotsleigh Old Girls who focused on and actioned what was required and essential: "give back

to your school". I was a woman on a mission, asking my school friends to give. If the old boys' system was giving millions, why could we not give something?'

Dr Archbold said it was a time when she thought seriously about the key foundation of her life and concluded it was her school and her headmistress, Betty Archdale. 'It is important for me to give back to Abbotsleigh through a bequest because my valuable years at the school broadened my capabilities to further extensions I had never dreamed of,' she says.

'The education system within Abbotsleigh in my time proved to build and unite individuality, to believe in ourselves, to be winners and never give up!'

It is a belief she wanted for her twin daughters, Edwina and Sarah (2000), who both attended Abbotsleigh. 'I value girls' education because it is the single most important component and gives us opportunities.'

It is the positive motivations and individualistic skills that Abbotsleigh girls learn that make them strong, according to Dr Archbold. 'I would like to see Abbotsleigh continue to flourish and I have a never-ending faith that there is always hope, love and truth, to [enable you to] be your best authentic person,' she says. 'Abbotsleigh teaches you this component and today this is important!'



Marian Clarke Society

Back and Gold 100% Silk scarf

\$100

Celebrate 140 years of Abbotsleigh with this **limited edition Black and Gold commemorative scarf**

- a timeless tribute to Abbotsleigh's proud legacy of empowering young women

All proceeds to go towards means-tested scholarships



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the QR code

Looking back through the windows of time

By Sarah Franks (1991) and Kim Boniface (Anderson, 1985)



Many Old Girls, when they enter the Chapel today, are somewhat surprised. Not only has there been an external facelift but also one on the inside: seats have replaced pews; there is very welcome heating and air-conditioning; and the light coming through the windows is remarkably different – the well-known yellowish-green pallor is now aglow with colour. The Chapel's glorious stained-glass windows are likely taken for granted by today's Abbotsleigh students but before 2009 the windows were a mottled plain glass, with the top and bottom panes having a hint of off-green.

So how did these incredible windows come to be part of the School's heritage? During this year of the 60th anniversary of Abbotsleigh Chapel, we caught up with the windows' designer, Jane Garrett (Maynard, 1983), to find out.

For many years, there were two banners hanging at the front of the Chapel, one on each side of the sanctuary. In 2009, the time had come for them to be replaced with something fresh and the Abbotsleigh Old Girls' Union (AOGU) was discussing options. One of the committee members, Louise Patrick (Piper, 1983) suggested that her classmate and friend Jane Garrett take a look. Jane was working as a graphic designer and her daughter, Phoebe, was in Year 4 at the time. On inspecting the Chapel banners, Jane made an off-hand comment along the lines of 'Gee, it would be nice to have stained-glass windows in here' and the rest, as they say, is history.

A small working group came together including the then headmistress Judith Poole, deputy headmistress Rosemary Abrahams, Publications manager and AOGU committee member Alex Norton (Deane, 1983), Old Girl Relations manager Sarah Gregory and Jane. Judith was keen to use the School Lesson, Philippians 4:4-9, as the key inspiration. The working group chose 10 words from the passage, one to represent each window on the east and west sides of the Chapel. The design of the panes was tied together with black and gold thread at the base

of each window to signify the 'weaver's shuttle', another nice nod to the School's traditions and motto.

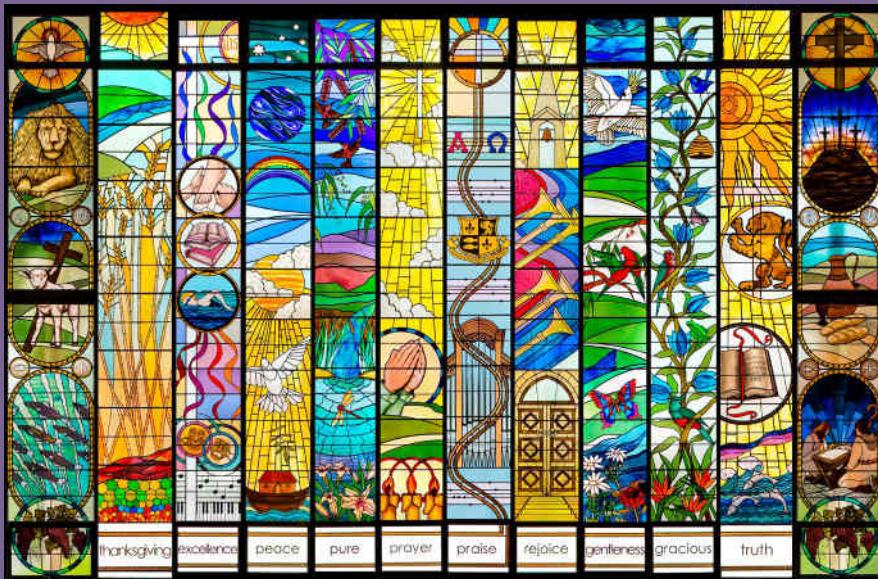
Jane recalls that there were many challenges in designing the windows. 'The greatest one was looking at how the light affected the design. Because the east side of the Chapel is warmer light and the west side is cooler light, it was essential to get the glass and designs to work with the different types of light. "Rejoice" to "Peace" on the east side were particularly difficult. This is where Rick Allen, the renowned heritage glazier, was a great help and his expertise was invaluable.'

'Have you seen how the rainbow from the "Peace" window radiates dappled light onto the floor at certain times of the day?' asks Jane. It's this attention to detail that really makes the windows sparkle.

'Another challenge,' she says, 'was what to do with the black and gold thread on the "Thanksgiving" and "Truth" windows, which have doors underneath them. The thread would be on a different level to the other windows and had to be adjusted.'

Jane also experienced a personal challenge, one that many parents face: time – juggling a young family, working every day, balancing school commitments and then designing the Chapel windows most nights. For the first 10 windows, the designs took about five to six months. 'A lot of time was spent studying the theology behind the School Lesson,' says Jane, 'with many trips to the library to borrow books, interviews with theologians and many helpful conversations with Rosemary Abrahams. The research was very time-consuming. Making sure I got the symbols and historical references correct for each of the 10 words was essential. I learnt a lot, which was great.'

Once the decisions were made on what was to be in a window, Jane worked the symbols into a design, eventually laying it out life-sized in black and white on a long roll of paper on her lounge-room floor. These rolls



It's the little details and symbols that make the windows special. Can you see:

- How circles repeat across the windows, as a sign of God's eternal love with no beginning and no end?
- The beehive in 'Gracious', representing the Church and symbolising community – in just the way we are celebrating connectedness during this 140th birthday year.
- The ribbons on 'Excellence', representing each of the Senior School house colours.
- The hummingbirds on 'Pure', a symbol of purity seen as a messenger from God, joy and freedom.

were then driven to Moss Vale to work with the glazier to select the right colours and patterns of glass. Once made, they were carefully installed in the Chapel.

'The best part of the job was seeing the Abbotsleigh Old Girls rally together to get the windows funded,' says Jane. This was a significant investment from individual donations and fundraising activities. The first two windows were installed at the end of 2009, with another two in early 2010 for the School's 125th birthday.

The two altar windows were designed and put in a few years later. 'They were easier to design as the birth and death of Christ were obvious contenders for the subject matter, being the altar and a key focus for the building,' says Jane.

So can she pick a favourite window? Apparently not! 'I could never choose a favourite, I feel like I know each window like an individual child. They each have their own special meaning to the School, the boarding community,

to the verse, the biblical message, history. Some designs came about much more easily,' she says, 'some were more challenging. "Gracious" and "Pure" took a while... the "Rejoice" design came easily.'

We give thanks to the legacy left by those who came before us to give Abbotsleigh the special Chapel windows: from Jane Garrett, who designed them; Rick Allen, the glazier who brought them to life; the working group and the AOGU for rallying behind them; and all those who generously donated the windows, either as families or community groups across School. These windows really were the result of a connected Abbotsleigh, pulling together for the greater good.

So, that's how the windows came to be in our Chapel... have you heard the story of how the German pipe organ became part of the furniture?



Scarves

100% silk, 'Rejoice' and 'Pure' Chapel Windows
Specially created to celebrate Abbotsleigh's 140th birthday
and the Chapel's 60th birthday.

\$90 each



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All proceeds donated to the Kathleen McCredie Award fund for means-tested Years 10-12 scholarships.

From the President of the AOGU



The coming together of the whole Abbotsleigh community during the 140th birthday year, coupled with this year's Prefect theme of 'Bee Connected', are fabulous opportunities to reflect on how Old Girls collectively support both the Abbotsleigh community and the communities in which they live.

Indeed, from the earliest days, the AOGU established a tradition to assist those in need. In December 1908, six months after the AOGU was established, a Charity Committee was formed which visited a Church Rescue Home for girls in Glebe Point; and then over the years sewed children's clothes and babies' nightgowns for Royal Prince Alfred Hospital and Crown Street Women's Hospital; donated to the War Chest Fund during World War I and the Fund for Starving Children in Europe in 1921; and ran a cake stall for Armenian refugees at the Abbotsleigh Fair in 1923.

We continue to see these values and effort reflected in what Old Girls do in their communities today. We are so proud to support the efforts of Old Girls in their social justice endeavours through the AOGU's Anniversary Grant, which provides funding to the projects they are undertaking, such as primary music education in remote NSW, résumé workshops in a domestic violence shelter, and menstrual hygiene education and products in Tanzania. It is inspiring to read the articles in this edition of *Around Abbotsleigh* about how last year's recipients are making a difference in our society.

Old Girls and the AOGU also have a tradition of rallying behind Abbotsleigh. Many Old Girls have served on Abbotsleigh Council, Foundation and the AOGU, and been very involved in fundraising both for prizes and scholarships, as well as buildings across the campus. Fundraising to build Abbotsleigh's Chapel was a mammoth task, starting in 1928 when the then headmistress Dorothea Poole shared her vision for a school chapel. There were a few snaffles along the way – including local clergy not wanting a chapel within school grounds, another world war, and other building priorities such as classrooms and an assembly hall that housed a small chancel. In 1948, the AOGU's Chapel

Sub-Committee, consisting primarily of Mrs Poole's former students, was determined to raise £10,000 (more than \$430,000 today) and this was achieved in 1955 by activities such as tea parties and selling some of Marian Clarke's paintings. When the Chapel was opened in 1965, the AOGU gave the pulpit, chalice and flagons and Old Girls donated items such as pews and Chapel gates. To celebrate the Chapel's 60th birthday, the AOGU has released special scarves based on the Chapel's stained-glass windows (designed by Old Girl Jane Garrett (Maynard, 1983). All are welcome to purchase these scarves, profits from which, like all our merchandise, will be donated to the Kathleen McCredie Award Fund. This fund was established by the AOGU in 2001 and awards means-tested scholarships for girls to have the opportunity of an Abbotsleigh education from Years 10-12.

The AOGU and Old Girls have donated many little things to Abbotsleigh over the years. From the original 1920s tennis courts that were near today's Grace Cossington Smith Gallery to a 1969 Pottery Room (jointly with the Abbotsleigh Parents' Association); from 1970s vases and chalices to the 'high tech' of a 1935 wireless set and 1960 electronic clock; from tables for the library to sets of Weavers for inside them, Old Girls have enhanced the experience of learning and being at Abbotsleigh. This can also be seen by each leaving class donating a gift to the School, leaving their imprint on Abbotsleigh and her community.

Last year the AOGU was delighted to present the Junior School with a 70th birthday present of a bronze statue of a daydreaming girl that can be found in the Primary playground. This year, for Abbotsleigh's 140th birthday, we are giving an artwork by Old Girl Julia Roberts (1983). The artwork brings the outside inside the new Betty Archdale Library, connecting generations of Abbotsleigh girls to each other and to the natural environment that has surrounded them while they have learnt, played and explored. We hope that students will enjoy having the artwork as part of their surroundings as they study.

From Old Girls and the AOGU, a big happy birthday to Abbotsleigh on her 140th birthday.

Sarah Franks (1991)
Honorary President



Languid Verticals, oil on plywood, by Julia Roberts (1983)

Archibald, Wynne and Sulman tour

A big group of more than 50 Old Girls, past parents and friends attended the private tour of the Archibald, Wynne and Sulman Exhibition at the Art Gallery of NSW on Friday 20 June. A highlight was having Archibald finalist Sally Ryan join us to discuss her wonderful portrait of Kathy Lette. This is her third time as an Archibald finalist and the second time she has joined our tour. Old Girl and Honorary Life Member of the AOGU, Annabel Baxter (Marr, 1965), led one of the groups through the exhibition, while past parent Wendy Atmore led the other group.



Annabel Baxter (Marr, 1965), from the AOGU Committee and a volunteer guide for the Art Gallery of NSW, takes a tour of Old Girls and family members around the Archibald

Both Annabel's and Wendy's phenomenal knowledge of artists and their works made the experience so much richer.

Afterwards a large group gathered at the Art Gallery Café to catch up over coffee, chatting for more than two hours before some went back to the exhibition. Thank you to Bronwyn Cooper (Ross-Jones, 1980) and Stephanie Chu (2008) from the Events Sub-Committee for organising this event.



Archibald finalist and artist Sally Ryan with her work *Lette Loose* of Kathy Lette



Left to right around the table: 1981 leavers Nicky Cooney (Clarke), Sarah Ingram (Mulveney), Fiona Hobill Cole (Armstrong), Libby Myles (Gilder) and Anna Pizzey (Stokes)



From left to right: Julia Sykes (Freeman, 1982), Anna Pizzey (Stokes, 1981), Sarah Ingram (Mulveney, 1981), Libby Myles (Gilder, 1981), Nicky Cooney (Clarke, 1981), Kate Richardson (Burton, 1982), Narelle Fay (Armstrong, 1983)



From left to right around the table: 1982 leavers Kate Richardson (Burton), Jenny Hart (Butchart), Kirsty Gyles, Julia Sykes (Freeman); Tracy McIntyre (Smith, 1978), Caroline Downing (1985) and Anna Gyles (1987)



Left to right around the table: Archibald finalist and artist, Sally Ryan, Philippa Stevens (Taylor, 1980), AOGU Events Sub-Committee Chair, Bronwyn Cooper (Ross-Jones, 1980), Audrey Kennedy (2024), AOGU President, Sarah Franks (1991), and her mother Robyn Franks, Jane Slack (Bentley, 1980) and Catherine Wilkinson (Herron, 1980)

Generations Breakfast

The 2025 AOGU Generations Breakfast took place on 4 April at the Junior School where more than 80 Old Girls and their daughters warmly welcomed new Old Girl mothers who have a daughter starting at Abbotsleigh this year.

AOGU President Sarah Franks welcomed everyone and highlighted that among those attending were Old Girl mums spanning 15 years from 1987-2002 and Old Girl grandmums from 1960-1969. Jessica McKay (Shannon, 1997) and her mum Prudence Shannon (Harrington, 1961) drove six hours to join Year 12 boarder Willa McKay's final chance to come to the breakfast!

It was very special to welcome in person four families back to the school: Penny Bayl (Hill, 1997) and daughter Lillian (Year 7); Bria Mira (Gunalingam, 1992) and daughter Lakshi Rajeev (Year 7); Meghann Parker (Allison, 1998) and daughter Emily (Year 9); and

Stephanie Seeto (1998) and daughter Ariana Champion (Year 5).

We wish the very best to all Old Girls and their families and are delighted they are now a part of a very special community at the School. A big thank you to Bron Cooper (Ross-Jones, 1980) and Helen Hudson (Charlton, 1967) from the AOGU Committee who organised the event.



Speakers Breakfast

Old Girls grabbed a cup of coffee early and joined the Speakers Breakfast online event to hear from the three 2024 AOGU Anniversary Grant recipients – Sheldyn Briggs (2016), Nicole Martin (1993) and Philippa Falconer (Skipper, 1987) – talk about their inspirational and diverse projects. Belinda Burton, Chair of the Anniversary Grant Committee, welcomed everyone and thanked the grant recipients for the opportunity to support Old Girls in 'paying it forward'.

The Anniversary Grant makes a small contribution to projects that have social impact and which benefit many individuals within a community, often working as a catalyst for ongoing change. A wide range of Old Girls attended the Speakers Breakfast, as well as Headmistress Megan Krimmer and Deputy Headmistress Tori Rennie (Gosper, 1987).

It was heartwarming to learn how these Old Girls are giving back to their communities. The questions from the

audience at the end demonstrated how many Old Girls want to support the grant recipients with their projects.

In response, Philippa Falconer suggested that any toys suitable for children, aged between 18 months and five years old, particularly art materials, would be gladly accepted for her Talk and Play program.

Sheldyn Briggs advised anyone who would like to purchase a Gamaro Sisters United T-shirt with the Indigenous design to please contact

AOGU@Abbotsleigh.nsw.edu.au

Nicole Martin encouraged anyone who wants to learn more about supporting the Foster Care program within Anglicare to contact her on Nicole.Martin@anglicare.org.au

Read our article on the Anniversary Grant winners to learn more about each of the projects these Old Girls are working on and the effect the grant is already having.



Sheldyn Briggs (2016)



Philippa Falconer (Skipper, 1987)

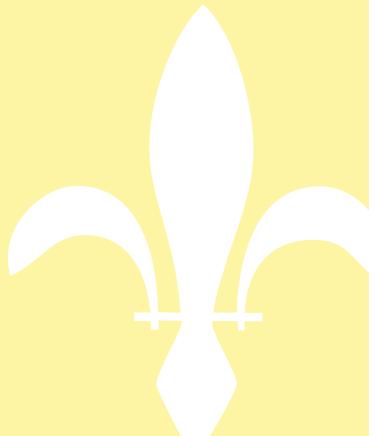


Nicole Martin (1993)

AOGU

110th Anniversary Grant 2024 recipients

Three Old Girls were recipients of the 2024 AOGU 110th Anniversary Grant and their inspirational projects are diverse. Sheldyn Briggs (2016) has founded Gamarlari Sisters United, which provides opportunities for Indigenous women and young people to participate in sporting events across the state; seeing a need to support disadvantaged preschool children who face speech and communication challenges, Philippa Falconer (Skipper, 1987) has created a Talk and Play program; and Nicole Martin (1993) is focused on how the Church and the Foster Circles program can improve support for foster care families and foster children, with a special emphasis on those children who have experienced complex developmental trauma or are neurodiverse.



Sheldyn Briggs

A proud Gamarlari woman from Moree, Northern NSW, Sheldyn Briggs (2016) is the President and founder of Gamarlari Sisters United (GSU), which provides opportunities for Indigenous women and young people to participate in sporting events across the state.

Sheldyn says her share of the grant was used to purchase uniforms and sporting equipment to kickstart GSU's establishment of a non-profit Indigenous women's rugby league team. Two First Nations women, including Sheldyn's sister, Jayda Craigie (2021), helped design the team's uniform.

'Our club aims to develop athletes as well as to foster a strong sense of community, identity and belonging,' Sheldyn says. 'For me, sport is more than just a game – it's a powerful tool for creating change. By giving our youth the opportunity to thrive on and off the field, we are paving the way for a stronger, more connected future.'

Sheldyn says she loved sport at school and her time as an Abbotsleigh boarder. 'I remember the parties thrown in dorms after lights out. I especially loved House Choir – my house, Wright, won when I was in Year 12,' Sheldyn told the AOGU Speakers Breakfast.

'Receiving a Yalari Scholarship to attend Abbotsleigh absolutely shaped the person I am today. Without it, I wouldn't have ended up at uni. It inspired and helped me want to give back to my community.'

After finishing school, Sheldyn graduated with a Bachelor of Teaching from UTS, before returning to work in regional NSW as a high school teacher. Through the GSU foundation, she hopes to nurture and empower the next generation of female leaders and role models. She noticed that in her hometown of Moree, while there are strong males to look up to, there aren't many female mentors in the school system, nor many Indigenous staff members.

Once the women's rugby league team is established, Sheldyn's plans for associated activities include school mentorship programs to promote First Nations educational engagement; free sanitary items to be provided at knockout events; and country camps to offer cultural awareness and connection.

'It's all up from here!' Sheldyn said, in thanking the AOGU for the grant.



Philippa Falconer

Philippa Falconer (Skipper, 1987) has been involved in community services for more than 20 years. She is the facilitator for the Schools as Community Centres (SaCC) Project at Woy Woy, within the NSW Department of Education.

As one of 47 SaCC projects based in or alongside public schools across NSW, particularly in areas where social disadvantage is prevalent, the initiative supports preschool children who face speech and communication challenges.

'We've noticed children's speech skills have got worse, coincidentally since Covid – we believe this might be due to kids watching too much television and increased screentime,' Philippa told the AOGU Speakers Breakfast.

She has developed the Early Intervention Talk and Play Program, providing activities that promote children's language development, gross motor skills and social interaction, as well as guidance for parents to reinforce those skills at home. 'Children need to see facial movements to learn how to speak,' she says. 'This initiative has been a passion project for me, and it is incredibly rewarding to see it come to fruition and make a positive impact on the lives of preschool children with speech difficulties.'

Philippa says the Anniversary Grant has funded the training of three onsite staff in basic speech assessments. While it's early days, the Talk and Play program has so far assisted 12 children and their parents.

'The staff are more comfortable in their roles and they are finding their footing in delivering the program effectively. This growing confidence is contributing to a positive learning environment for the children... ensuring they are better equipped for the transition into the school system,' says Philippa.

She credits boarding at Abbotsleigh for teaching her that barriers can be overcome with effort and determination. 'As a boarder, I learnt to step out of my comfort zone and collaborate with others; it helped me build confidence and develop essential interpersonal skills. Overall, my time at Abbotsleigh shaped my approach to challenges and my commitment to helping others.'

Nicole Martin

Nicole Martin (1993) was disappointed she was not able to join the Speakers Breakfast in person as she was en route to Sydney from the US. Instead, she sent a video to share her important project within the Foster Circles program.

Nicole is Head of Foster Care for Anglicare and has worked in social work, child protection and foster care for 28 years, so is very familiar with many of the challenges faced within the sector. She is passionate about caring for children and families in our community and concerned about the growing foster care crisis. She and her team are focused on how the Church and the Foster Circles program can improve support for foster care families and foster children, with a growing agenda that aims to provide trauma-informed safe spaces within churches for the children to relax and play while their carers have a break and get further support and time to interact with their community.

Nicole explained how the 2024 Anniversary Grant 'has already been used to create a valuable safe space and to purchase selected equipment to furnish a sensory environment suitable for foster care children to attend play groups at St James Church, Turramurra.

'The equipment will be used by children attending children's ministries who have experienced complex developmental trauma or are neurodiverse, which is common for children in foster care. This space helps children manage their emotions and participate in the church's children's ministry activities... in a safe, supportive environment.'

Being awarded one of the grants has been so important in helping expand the reach of these trauma-informed spaces, she says, and is also 'being used to train church staff and volunteers to run the play group, as well as establish a written resource outlining trauma-informed approaches, which can now be shared more widely.'

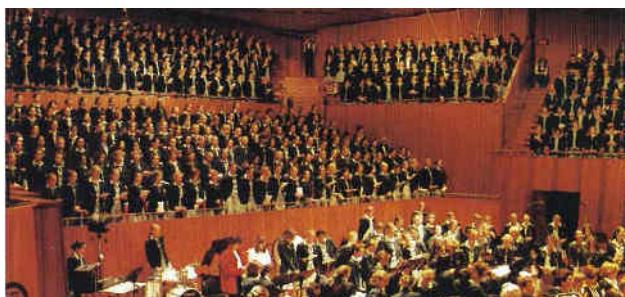
'The impact of this grant will continue to be felt for many years to come,' says Nicole, with staff receiving valuable input and advice about helping manage the complex needs of children with developmental trauma and further supporting their carers in remaining involved with their local community.'

Hitting all the right notes

Inspired by the spectacular 140th Birthday Concert, we invited Old Girls who have made their careers in music to share their stories with Old Girls Relations Assistant Rhonda Kaan (Turner, 1993)

Abbotsleigh's milestone anniversaries have been spectacularly celebrated on several occasions at the iconic Sydney Opera House and this year's 140th Birthday Concert was no exception. Special events, including the Centenary Speech Day in 1985, the 110th Speech Day in 1995 and, as described in *Around Abbotsleigh* at the time, the 'magnificent' 125th anniversary Jubilation Concert in 2010 were all hosted at the Opera House.

Since the days of Miss Marian Clarke, music has played an important role in the School and so this year's concert, honouring both tradition and innovation, was the perfect showcase for Abbotsleigh's longstanding commitment to excellence in music education. Appropriately titled Night of a Thousand Stars, the 140th anniversary concert celebrated the thousands of young women, 'stars', who have loved music and who have



110th Birthday Concert at the Sydney Opera House, 1995

passed through the hallways of Abbotsleigh over the past 140 years.

A Night of a Thousand Stars was a luminous testament to the enduring spirit of Abbotsleigh – past, present and future – and a highlight in yet another milestone year of celebration and so it was a fitting moment to reflect on the achievements of the many Old Girls whose passion for music began during their schooldays and who have gone on to make a career in music. We begin with our wonderful AbbSchool Music Tutor and Old Girl, Jude Huxtable. Brief summaries of our other musical Old Girls' careers follow and you can find an expanded version of their many achievements by clicking [here](#) or scanning the QR Code.



125th Birthday Concert at the Sydney Opera House, 2010



130th Birthday Concert at the Sydney Opera House, 2015

**Jude Huxtable
(Howell, 1973)****AbbSchool Music Tutor**

This year might be Abbotsleigh's 140th birthday but it also marks a remarkable milestone – a golden jubilee – for devoted staff member and Old Girl Jude Huxtable (Howell, 1973). Jude commenced as a student at Abbotsleigh in 1968 and in her final year, in 1973, she was a School Prefect as well as a member of the Chamber Orchestra and First XI Cricket team.

It was only two years later that she returned as a flute teacher and, apart from a short stint for maternity leave, Jude has been unwaveringly teaching the flute to students at Abbotsleigh, which now makes her Abbotsleigh's longest serving staff member!

Over the past 50 years, Jude has taught and mentored countless budding musicians, conducted and tutored ensembles, accompanied the 2018 New Zealand Band Tour and contributed to myriad music camps and workshops. Current Abbotsleigh Head of Music Lynette Clarke describes Jude as 'an exceptionally talented flautist, recorder player and educator who has nurtured generations of flautists in the Abbotsleigh Music Department.

'As the beloved "mother hen" of our peripatetic team, she has guided both students and colleagues with warmth and wisdom, leading flute ensembles across both Junior and Senior Schools and passionately supporting our band program,' Mrs Clarke said. 'We are truly privileged to work alongside Jude.'

Jude says:

'I began teaching flute at Abbotsleigh in 1975 at the invitation of Nikki Seymour, the then head of Music and my flute teacher. I have been there ever since, with one year off for maternity leave in 1988. I have occupied Room 7 in the Music school since we moved into the Centenary Building. I owe an immense debt of gratitude to Nikki, who exposed me to such a huge range of music, flute repertoire, choral music, singers of renown and their repertoire, far more than I would have discovered on my own.'

'My love of classical music exploded in me at age 15 and gave me focus in an environment where I was chiefly renowned for chatting too much and being the class clown. My poor teachers! Joint productions with Barker College of Britten's *Noyes Fludde* and Vivaldi's *Gloria* were highlights, as was every moment of singing in choir and 12 Voice Choir. Music saw me through so many difficulties and became what it is now, central to my life.'

'Along with Nikki, Sandra Parton, my gorgeous chamber music teacher and Viv Schinckel, our fabulous accompanist, were teachers who saw beyond my craziness, who "saw" me, the real me. There were a handful of others, including Judy Copeland, my Year 9 form teacher, Alison Copeman, who rescued me from myself in Year 10 French, and Kit Raymond, our long-suffering PE teacher – but those are other stories.'

'Music nurtured me and, in turn, the nurtured has become the nurturer. I have the privilege of teaching my students one-on-one, sometimes from Year 3 all the way to Year 12. There is plenty of time and space for each of my students to be "noticed", to grow musically and individually, and to learn about themselves and their abilities and the wonder of music.'

'I love it and can't imagine my life any other way.'

'Abbotsleigh's Music Department is a wonderful place. It is my home, sometimes my sheltered workshop, a place to be myself and to give of my best. It is a place where I can be amongst my family of amazing colleagues, many of whom have taught with me for many, many years. We continue to learn from each other and support each other and appreciate one another's abilities and knowledge. They are a gentle, capable mob who provide exquisite guidance to the girls in their care.'

'Outside Abbotsleigh I also teach at The King's School, I am an AMEB examiner, I have co-written a book on flute pedagogy and presented to teachers at the Australian Flute Festival on several occasions.'

'I perform on recorders and baroque flute, with Consort 8, a Sydney early music group.'



Christina Barry (1975)

Soprano, singing teacher

After studying science at university, Christine pursued singing in Switzerland and performed widely in England. Teaching then became her passion and for 27 years she taught at a school very like Abbotsleigh, helping students develop confident voices. Many of her students have gone on to professional careers, others still sing for joy. Now semi-retired, Christine has more time for pastoral ministry but continues to explore music with singers, young and old.



Anne Cahill OAM (Carroll, 1972)

Musician, teacher, arts ambassador

Anne began her career in finance before following her passion for music into cultural policy roles at the Music Board of the Australia Council and NSW Ministry for the Arts. While raising children, she taught piano locally and chaired The Orchestras of Australia Network. Her final workplace was at Musica Viva Australia in education and development. Anne continues to serve on arts boards and perform with the Ku-ring-gai Philharmonic Orchestra.



Elizabeth Campbell (1969)

Mezzo-soprano

Elizabeth studied at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music after Abbotsleigh, then spent years performing and studying in London and Europe. Returning to Australia in 1984, she built a distinguished career with all major opera companies, symphony orchestras, and in recitals and recordings. Married to tenor Thomas Edmonds, she now lives in the Adelaide Hills, both retired, and recently helped release his autobiography, *Ev'ry Valley: A Tenor's Journey*.



Melissa Chominsky (1994)

Principal cellist

Melissa is a versatile and engaging cellist, performing regularly across Australia and internationally. Currently based in Melbourne, she is Principal Cellist of Orchestra Victoria and has appeared as guest Principal Cellist with other major Australian orchestras. Concerts have taken her to many parts of the globe and she has collaborated with artists ranging from Simone Young, Yo-Yo Ma and Pavarotti to Missy Higgins and the Teskey Brothers.



Grace Collivett (Gallur, 2016)

Opera singer

After school, Grace moved to Melbourne to study at the conservatorium and built a portfolio career in performing, teaching, community music and arts administration. Last year she moved to Copenhagen where she has just accepted a place in the prestigious Masters of Opera at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki. Supported by a travelling scholarship from the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, Grace is aiming to build a soloist career across Europe and Australia.



Anna Cooper (2007)

Flautist, teacher

Anna is a freelance flautist and teacher based in Sydney who studied with the Carnegie Mellon University, the University of Texas, the Australian National Academy of Music in Melbourne and Adelaide University. Anna has performed with major Australian orchestras and internationally with the Pittsburgh Symphony and Opera Orchestras. She is a previous winner of the Australian Flute Festival competition and a quarter-finalist at the National Flute Association Young Artist Competition (USA).



Jane Ede (Parkin, 1993)

Principal soprano

Jane Ede is a leading Australian operatic soprano known for her elegant singing and dramatic flair. With Opera Australia, she has performed principal roles in *Cosi Fan Tutte*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Falstaff*, *La Bohème*, *Don Giovanni* and *The Ring Cycle* and recently reprised roles in *The Marriage of Figaro* and *Carmen*. Jane is a graduate of Wollongong University and the Sydney Conservatorium of Music and holds an MBA from the Australian Institute of Business.



[Click here](#) or scan for extended profiles



Jane Ede



Sarah Findlay (Denison, 1971)

Church musician, social worker

After studying social work at the University of Sydney, Sarah embarked on a successful 45-year career in the field. Meanwhile, wanting to join the new style of church music developing in the 1980s and determined to overcome her self-consciousness from playing in school orchestras, Sarah adapted her classical flute training to a more relaxed style – she has been playing in church bands ever since.



Amy Fox (2021)

Trumpet player, composer, educator

Amy is a Sydney-based trumpet player, composer and educator. She is currently completing her Honours year in Jazz Performance at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, where she was awarded the 2022 Myron Kantor Bequest Scholarship and the 2025 Anthony and Sharon Lee Foundation Jazz Scholarship. This year, Amy was a featured soloist at the conservatorium's 110th Birthday Chancellor's Concert and was recently awarded a mentorship through the Music Arrangers Guild of Australia.



Nao Gamo (2000)

Organ Scholar

Nao was one of Abbotsleigh's first Organ Scholars and is now a neuroscientist-turned-entrepreneur based in Washington, DC. She studied Brain and Cognitive Sciences and Music at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, unexpectedly finding herself immersed in music history, theory, composition and music cognition research. She later earned a PhD from Yale and completed postdoctoral research at Johns Hopkins University. Today, she helps launch medical technology startups and runs a consulting firm.



Yasmin Lin (2021)

Teacher, performer and psychologist

Music has been a central part of Yasmin's life for as long as she can remember. At Abbotsleigh, she was involved in numerous ensembles, musicals and two European tours. This passion continued into university, where she recently completed a Bachelor of Psychology while performing in more than ten musicals, events and gigs. Yasmin has been a piano teacher for six years and has music-directed multiple musicals.



Amy Nelson (2017)

Singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist

Since graduating, Amy has pursued her passion for music, touring Australia as a singer-songwriter/multi-instrumentalist under the stage name Little Green. Her work captures the longing for something lost – innocence and childlike wonder – and songs such as 'Little Star' and 'Galaxies' were given new life in her arrangement of 'Night of a Thousand Stars', which she performed at our 140th Birthday Concert. Her second album, *Parody of Paradise*, was released recently.



Karen North (1977)

Music teacher, author

With decades of experience in music education, Karen is known for her creative approach to teaching. She is the author of The Young Flute Player series and, in recent years, has focused on commissioning new works from living composers. These works, more than 100 of them, have been warmly embraced around the world. In 2021, Karen established the Lyrical Flute International Championship, open to students and amateur adult players.



Helen Parker (Cook, 2004)

Percussionist

Helen plays timpani and percussion for orchestras around Sydney and particularly delights in children's concerts. She spent several years playing for The Hills Music Academy concert band, winning the National Band Championships and other awards. This year, she played the soundtrack to *Jaws* at the Sydney Opera House (SOH) to accompany a screening of the film and also performed for the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia as part of a cultural exchange, again at the SOH.



Sophia Pinter (2022)

Percussionist, teacher

Returning to Abbotsleigh as a percussion music mentee has been a deeply rewarding experience for Sophia. She says being part of the 140th birthday concert, *Night of a Thousand Stars*, was a true highlight, not only as a celebration of the School's musical legacy but also as a moment to reflect on the growth and achievements of students she had been working with and she was proud to see them perform with such confidence and commitment.



Jenny Liu (2007)

Operatic soprano and singing teacher

Jenny completed a Bachelor of Music Performance and Advanced Diploma of Opera at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, receiving the Helen Myer Merit Scholarship each year from 2008–2011. She made her professional debut with Opera Australia in *The King and I*, performing more than 200 times. Jenny has sung leading operatic and concert roles across Australia, including *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Carmina Burana*, and *Messiah* and premiered works by Australian composers.



Jenny Liu



Megwenya (Meg) Matthews (Giblin, 1960)

Singer, choral conductor, pianist, music educator

Meg has dedicated her life to music through teaching, broadcasting, conducting and adult education. She directed the Gallery Choir at Knox Grammar for 16 years and chaired the NSW branch of the Royal School of Church Music for over a decade. Meg now lectures for adult groups and gives pre-concert talks for ensembles including the Willoughby Symphony Orchestra and at the Sydney Opera House for the Sydney Philharmonia.



Airena Nakamura (1993)

Principal second violinist

Airena is Principal Second Violinist with the Opera Australia Orchestra, where she has performed for over 20 years. After earning her Bachelor of Music Performance, she toured nationally and internationally before settling into her long-standing role. Now also a wife and mother of two grown-up children pursuing music careers, Airena continues to find joy in the rich repertoire of opera and ballet and a life shaped by music.



Georgia Powell (Bassingthwaighte, 1989)

Opera singer, performer, teacher

Georgia started piano lessons in primary school. At Abbot's Leigh, she expanded her love of music, particularly singing. After graduating at the University of Sydney, she worked in the corporate world while studying a Diploma of Opera at the Sydney Conservatorium and then spent two years working and singing in London. In 2001, she joined the Opera Australia (OA) chorus. Georgia still works with OA on a contract basis and also teaches Vocal Studies.



Clare Rowe (1995)

Ccellist, teacher

Clare has performed as a chamber and orchestral musician in Australia and the UK. Now a cellist with the Hallé Orchestra in Manchester, she plays in a variety of concerts, from Mahler symphonies with Sir Mark Elder to collaborations with the Singapore Chinese Orchestra and touring with Diana Ross. She studied cello in Sydney, gaining a BMus degree at the conservatorium and then a Diploma in Professional Performance. Clare also teaches cello in Manchester.



Caitlin Rowley (1990)

Experimental composer, performer

Caitlin creates works for live performance but also scores that take the form of unique art objects, video pieces and a virtual reality piece, *Haydn Space Opera*. An experimental vocalist and noise violinist, her skills also include electronics, lipsync and characterisation. In collaboration with acclaimed composer-performer group Bastard Assignments, she produced musiktheater piece *PIGSPIGSPIGS* and an eight-hour live-performance installation *HOUSE*. Caitlin is finalising her PhD in interdisciplinary composition.



[Click here](#) or scan for extended profiles



This photo: Max Colson

Caitlin's photo above left: Frederick Goff; Styling: Evans and Robert George Sanders.



Rachel Scott (1990)

Chamber musician, music educator

Rachel studied in Canberra and London with cellists David Pereira and Robert Cohen. She runs a concert series called Bach in the Dark, performing in non-traditional venues, alongside other musicians, artists and actors; and works for the charity Australian Children's Music Foundation, teaching music to disadvantaged children in urban, regional, remote and behavioural schools and the School of the Air. Rachel has also trained music teachers in East Timor and Australia.



Sarah (Sally) Schinckel-Brown (Schinckel, 1975)

Cellist

One of the most successful freelance cellists in Australia, Sally has performed in classical orchestras, including the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Australian Chamber Orchestra and the Australian Opera Ballet Orchestra, as well as freelance orchestras for artists such as Led Zeppelin, Stevie Wonder, Todd McKenney, Human Nature, Kanye West and Jose Carreras. She has performed and toured in shows including *Evita*, *Camelot*, *Cats*, *Miss Saigon*, *Wicked* and *The Addams Family*.



Amber Shepherd

EDM artist

Professionally known as Amba Shepherd, Amber is the voice behind some of electronic dance music's (EDM) most iconic anthems, captivating millions of listeners worldwide with her distinctive vocals and heartfelt songwriting. Her collaborations with legendary artists such as Hardwell, Tiësto, R3HAB and Paul Oakenfold have earned nearly a billion combined streams, multiple ARIA Club Chart Top Tens, three US iTunes #1 Dance releases and a double platinum certification for the EDM anthem *Apollo*.



Sophie Spencer (2022)

Trumpeter, brass player

After attending the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, Sophie studied at the Australian National Academy of Music between 2018 and 2021. Her fond memories include touring to India with the Australian World Orchestra Tour, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra Fellowship, Opera Australia's National Tour and performing solo with ANAM. As well as teaching, Sophie has performed in many shows, including *Wicked*, *Cinderella*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Carousel* and the *Les Misérables* Arena World Tour.



Barbara Tink (1974)

Violist, French horn player, singer

While at Abbotsleigh, Barbara enjoyed 'fabulous social and musical times' with Sydney Youth Orchestra and National Music Camps before gaining her BMus at the University of Sydney. Singing has always been a passion but when she discovered the viola it led to the formation of the Linton String Quartet, which she managed for 17 years. There was little time for music in the 20 years Barbara worked as a medical Fly-in, Fly-out but, since retirement, she has joined the Joubert Singers to sing Bach.



Claire Vowell (Hargreaves, 2007)

Music teacher

Since completing a Bachelor of Music/Bachelor of Education in 2012, Claire has enjoyed teaching music across schools in Sydney, the UK and Brisbane. In Year 8, she remembers sitting in Ingrid Little's Music class thinking 'that looks like a pretty fun job!'

She loves being able to think and talk about music all day, inspiring students to broaden their musical horizons and thinks it a joy and a privilege to be a part of this journey for so many young people.



Anne Wang (2011)

Assistant Orchestra Librarian and ear training specialist at the Juilliard

Anne credits the 'fantastic Music Department at Abbotsleigh' for a path that took her to the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, then to the Juilliard School in New York where she attained her Bachelor's and Master's in Music and a Doctorate of Musical Arts. She is now an Assistant Orchestra Librarian at Juilliard's John Williams Orchestra Library and enjoys her role in the Ear Training Faculty. Active as a composer, Anne co-directed New York Youth Symphony's Composition Program this past season.



Katie Webster (Robinson, 2013)

Pianist, musical theatre director

At the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, Katie studied a degree majoring in classical piano performance. She spent two years touring Australia, conducting orchestras and playing the piano in *Mary Poppins*, and went to Singapore with a production of *Sunset Boulevard*. Other favourite performances include *Beautiful: the Carole King Musical*, *Jersey Boys* and *Wicked*. Katie also enjoys freelancing with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and the Opera Australia Orchestra.

International Reunions

London and New York

Victoria Rennie (Gosper, 1987), Deputy Headmistress and Head of Senior School, reports on two fabulous celebrations of Abbotsleigh spirit

As part of our 140th celebrations, with the knowledge that Abbotsleigh girls are everywhere, it was a wonderful opportunity for Headmistress Megan Krimmer and me to traverse the globe and join our vibrant community of Old Girls in two of the world's most iconic cities – New York and London – for unforgettable reunion events that truly embodied the Abbotsleigh spirit.

These reunions were more than just celebrations; they were gatherings of connection, inspiration and shared experience. Across the generations, Old Girls reunited to catch up, share stories and reflect on the journeys that began within the gates of Abbotsleigh.

From recent graduates to girls from previous decades, it was heartwarming to see so many year groups represented, each bringing their own unique experiences and perspectives. The evenings were filled with laughter, heartfelt conversations and the joy of rekindling old friendships while forging new ones.

At the heart of these events was a deep sense of connection, community and belonging. Abbotsleigh has always been more than a school – it's a lifelong network.

These reunions offered valuable opportunities for networking, mentorship and career development, as Old Girls generously shared their insights and experiences with one another. I was especially moved by the knowledge sharing and mentorship that took place. Our older Old Girls offered guidance and support, reinforcing the idea that the Abbotsleigh connection doesn't end at graduation – it evolves and strengthens over time, wherever in the world that may be.

For me, as a leader at the School and an Old Girl, hearing about the incredible things Abbotsleigh girls are doing all around the world is inspiring and affirming. These stories remind me of the impact of an Abbotsleigh education and the enduring strength of our community.

In marking our 140th celebrations, these reunions were a beautiful testament to the values we hold dear. They reminded me that no matter where life takes us the bond we share with Abbotsleigh remains strong. Here's to 140 years of connection – and to many more fabulous reunions to come!



1977 Leavers Boarder Reunion

Lindy McCormack, Sue Robinson, Katrina Ryan, Sue Guest and Jill Garnock planned for over a year to gather all the boarders from the 1977 year for a weekend reunion from 14-16 March 2025. Only about five were unable to attend and only one has died (RIP Sue Lloyd).

About 30 of us met in Orange and enjoyed catching up over Friday night dinner, Saturday lunch (from noon until 7 pm!) and Sunday brunch. We also welcomed a few day

girls, one of whom (Techa H) said: 'Brilliantly organised, girls! Thank you so much Lindy, Robbo, Jill, Sue and Trin – what a committee. It was a wonderful fiesta of non-stop chatter and catch up. As an honorary boarder, I was tickled pink to be invited.'

We have formed a WhatsApp group to help us stay in touch and easily share news and photos.



From classroom to courtroom: Penny Hock (Anderson, 1969)

A friendship lasting almost six decades has stretched from the classroom all the way to the courtroom – but, thankfully, for all the right reasons.

In April, after 24 years of service, members of the District Court of NSW, along with invited friends and family, gathered to mark the retirement of Judge Penny Hock (Anderson, 1969) at a special ‘bench farewell’ in the Ceremonial Courtroom in Sydney.

Among the crowd celebrating Judge Hock’s outstanding career were schoolmates and fellow 1969 leavers Sharon Davis (Boult), Jackie Rees (Selosse) and Jude Davis (Hughes).

During her valedictory address, Penny reflected on her years as a District Court judge – and indeed her life – noting that she had benefitted from ‘a great deal of good fortune’.

‘I was fortunate enough to have Betty Archdale as my headmistress from 1964-1969, and she was an inspiration,’ she said.

‘This may come as a surprise to many of my younger female colleagues but, at that time, other principals at girls’ schools were still telling their students, “Go to university, but you won’t need to get a job – you just need to find a husband.” As it happened, I did that too!’

Judge Hock said Ms Archdale was adamant that her girls should be independent and forge careers – ‘and we did’.

Having spent her first professional life as a primary school teacher from 1975-1981, in 1984 Penny was only the 157th woman to be admitted to the Bar in Australia.



Back in 2019, these three friends appeared on the cover of the book *Threads Through Time* – a photographic publication celebrating Abbotsleigh’s 125-year history. The photo was taken at a 50-year reunion. From left: Penny Hock (Anderson), Sharon Davis (Boult) and Jackie Rees (Selosse)

Forty years later, she noted, there are still only around 1,200 female representatives.

‘I was the 11th female judge appointed [to the District Court in NSW] but today there are 38 female judges,’ she said.

Chief Judge, the Honourable Justice Sarah Huggett, described Judge Hock as a ‘widely respected and valued’ member of the court. ‘Her Honour is known both inside and outside the courtroom for her integrity, fairness and diligence,’ she said. ‘Her courtroom is one where solemnity and decorum are always observed.’

Outside of the courtroom, Chief Judge Huggett said Judge Hock’s warm personality, coupled with her generosity of time and willingness to listen, had bestowed upon them a mentor, a trusted friend and someone who was always optimistic and smiling. ‘On behalf of all the judges of the court and the people of NSW, I thank you for your service and dedication, and wish you the very best in retirement,’ Chief Judge Huggett said.



At the retirement ceremony, Penny was accompanied by daughter Charlotte (2006) and sons Edward and Ben (her third son Willem was online from New York)



At the retirement function, the three ‘cover girls’ were joined by Old Girl Jude Davis (Hughes, 1969) as well as many other friends and family online

Congratulations



Well done, Eliza

Congratulations to Old Girl Eliza Fagan (2019), who recently graduated from the University of NSW in Landscape Architecture, scoring First Class Honours with the University Medal. Eliza started full time work this year at Tract Design as a graduate landscape architect.

Across all the disciplines within the Built Environment, only three medals were presented – all to young women.

Congratulations, Madam President

This year, Christine Rapa (Jensen, 1996) was elected as President of the American Association of Textile Chemists and Colorists (AATCC), a not-for-profit organisation focused on international textile test standards.

In the January edition of the AATCC magazine, *Review*, she gave a shoutout to Abbotsleigh, as the place she 'was first introduced to Textiles and Design'. Christine went on to receive a Bachelor's and Master's degree in Textile Engineering in the US.

'For the past 25 years,' she says, 'I have worked in the US textile and apparel industry and am currently a textile engineer at W L Gore & Associates (manufacturer of GORE-TEX).

'Being elected President of AATCC is a huge honour for me and I want to thank Abbotsleigh for igniting my passion for textiles.

'I am also signed up and looking forward to meeting up with other Abbotsleigh Old Girls in New York [in June of this year]!'



Dramatic turn

Aria Munton (2024) writes about a recent personal achievement: 'I had the opportunity to play a younger version of one of the main characters on *Mystery Road: Origin*. This experience not only involved on-screen performance but also voice acting work. I'm grateful to Mr Owens who helped me build the skills to take on this role. Being part of such a well-known Australian series was truly a proud moment.'



Dimity (Norton, 2009) and Justin O'Brien are thrilled to announce the arrival of Jack Warwick O'Brien on 23 July 2025. Brother to Primrose, Nina and Edward. Welcome to the circus, Jack!



Congratulations to Prudence Thompson (2013) and Alex Walton, who tied the knot at Wallalong in 2024. Many Old Girls were part of the bridal party, including Prudence's sisters Phoebe Codling (Thompson, 2008) and Beatrice (2012), and friends Sophie Woodrow (Jobson, 2013), Rachael Potter (2103) and Madeline Miller.

Yes, chef! ”

The final touches to our new dining precinct will be completed over the 2025-2026 summer holidays. In the lead up to its opening, we are planning a feature on Old Girls involved in the food hospitality industry in the next issue of *Around Abbotsleigh* (which will be distributed in early 2026).

If you are an Old Girl chef, caterer, restaurateur, event manager or involved in the food industry and would like to be included – or know of an Old Girl who might be interested – please contact the Old Girls Office at oldgirls@abbotsleigh.nsw.edu.au as soon as possible, and by Saturday 1 November at the latest.



Sue Cross (Jacobs, 1949)

Died 28 March 2025

Sue was born in 1932 in Killara, the second of Edwin and Evelyn Jacobs' two daughters. Her elder sister was Margaret Turner (Jacobs, 1946). She began her schooling and life-long love of Abbotsleigh in 1940. While there, she threw herself into a raft of sports and adventures, including tennis, hockey, swimming and cricket. In her final year, 1949, she was Vice Head Prefect.

Following school, Sue qualified as an occupational therapist, pursuing her career on and off until her marriage to Bob Cross, a dentist, in 1962. The couple settled into life in Warrawee and were delighted to build their family, becoming devoted parents to three children, Ian, David and Diana. In time, Diana would also attend Abbotsleigh, graduating in 1985.

Sue firmly believed that: first, if you wanted to contribute to society, it should be done by participating and not by sitting on the sidelines; and second, if you were going to participate you had to be 'all-in'. She directed her boundless energy and great capabilities to a range of interests in her adult life. These included Avondale Golf Club, where she was Ladies Club Captain for several years (and ultimately a 'distinguished member'), and the Noah's Ark Toy Library for Children with Special Needs, where she volunteered her time in her capacity as an occupational therapist and as a fundraiser.

But Sue's greatest contribution was to Abbotsleigh. She was passionate about the School and the opportunities that it could provide young women to become their best selves. Between 1980 and 1988, she was an Old Girls' Representative on the School's Council. She dedicated significant time to the development of Abbotsleigh, including leading the Buildings Committee. In addition to her time on the council, Sue was for many years a member of the Abbotsleigh Old Girls' Union Committee and throughout her life she could be seen at events such as speech days, Old Girl Golf Days, celebratory lunches and morning teas. Indeed, her picture appeared so frequently in *Around Abbotsleigh* that her daughter's school friends would play a game of 'Where's Sue Cross?' in the genre of 'Where's Wally'?

Sue and Bob's marriage was a long and happy one. Although she was to miss her husband for the rest of

her life, following Bob's death in 2010, Sue filled her days by dedicating even more of her time to her hobbies, to volunteering for the community, and to her friends. Her positive approach, can-do attitude, loyalty and vast capacity for joy earnt her an extraordinary number of friends and admirers. Intelligent, driven and charismatic, she had a tremendous sense of fun and kindness. Among her daughter's friends, she was known as 'the Orb' for her general wisdom and generous gardening advice.

Sue's contribution to the world can well be summed up by her long-held philosophy: 'I expect to pass through this world but once. Therefore, any good that I can do or any kindness that I can show to any fellow creature, let me do it now for I shall not pass this way again.'

Sue was tremendously proud of her children and her two grandchildren, Alex and Henry. She passed away peacefully on 28 March 2025. The world is a poorer place without her.

And from the AOGU: Sue will be remembered for her great contribution to Abbotsleigh over the years, serving on both the AOGU Committee and Abbotsleigh Council as an AOGU Representative, and being instrumental in setting up the Marian Clarke Society. She is remembered fondly by many of the current AOGU Committee, who enjoyed serving with her and admired her outstanding organisational ability, exemplary work ethic and talent for fostering good relationships in her work. She developed a close and special relationship with the Junior School while serving on council in Property Development work.

The AOGU Committee also remembers Sue's enthusiasm for AOGU Card and Golf Days. Her support of many AOGU presidents is also well remembered and included Sue Atwill, Margaret Lockhart, Margaret Sachs and Annabel Baxter. She was also a good friend and support to Rebecca Baillie's mother, Caroline (Carol) Baillie, who was president of the [then] Ladies Auxiliary. All have fond memories of one of Sue's favourite sayings: that 'the AOGU is a big old ship which ploughs through the waves and always comes through in the end'.

Linda Jean Barnes (1965)

Died 6 February 2025



Jean, as she preferred to be called later in life, was born in 1949 in Willoughby, the fourth of six siblings. She spent her childhood with her head in a book, her hands on a piano keyboard and was a high achiever academically through university. Jean loved the German language, which she studied at Abbotsleigh and then at the University of Sydney. She joined the then Department of Immigration and at just 23 years of age was posted to Chicago as Australia's Vice Consul. Notably, and in line with her convictions but to the chagrin of her conservative father, she flew to Chicago wearing an 'It's Time' badge,

proclaiming support for then Labor Opposition leader Gough Whitlam who would become prime minister later that year.

Subsequently, Jean had postings to Kuala Lumpur as Australia's Consul in Malaysia, and at the end of the Vietnam War to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) to manage Australia's Vietnamese refugee program. Ironically, one of her brothers had served in the Army in Vietnam and, despite Jean's political opposition to the war, she strongly supported his service. Her final posting was to Bonn, Germany where at last she was able to put her beloved German to good use. Jean retired early due to illness, leaving Canberra and its conflicts for a quieter life in Wentworth Falls where she could be closer to family carers.

Robin Stevenson (Royle, 1940)

Died 6 September 2024



Robin passed away peacefully, in her home at Kirribilli, just two weeks short of her 101st birthday, with her nephew, Dr John Brereton, by her side. Her funeral was held at St Luke's Mosman, on 20 September 2024.

Robin's father built the huge, 250,000 gallon water tank that is still at Abbotsleigh. He took the family travelling to New Guinea early in Robin's life and she enjoyed the tripping

around Europe and England that she did in later years. Robin worked for her father and loved the years afterwards when she worked as an associate in the Sydney legal world.

She married William Dill Stevenson in 1992. Sadly, he died a few years later, in 2000. In 2006, Robin established the Abbotsleigh Royle Scholarship for girls moving into Year 10 or 11, who have an Old Girl from Abbotsleigh in the family.

Robin was much loved and appreciated by all her nieces and nephews.

We Remember

Julia **DILLON** (Lamble, 1972)

Amanda **MacGILLIVRAY** (Nash, 1972)

Virginia **RYAN** (Rorke, 1965)

Thank you to our donors

We are so grateful to all those who support the Foundation's work. With the support from our community, we can continue to provide means-tested scholarships and state-of-the-art buildings. Thank you also to those who have chosen to remember Abbotsleigh in their wills and to those who gave but have asked to remain anonymous.

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