



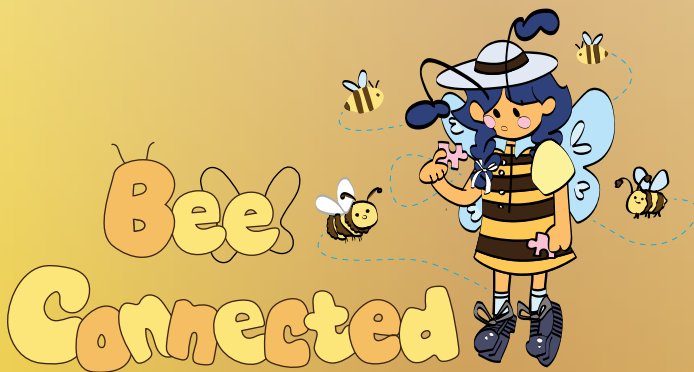
ABBOTSLEIGH

140 Years
Abbotsleigh
1885 - 2025

Around Abbotsleigh



Bee Connected: Our cover shows a detail from the mural on Abbotsleigh's Senior School campus, which was commissioned from the artist Matt Willey. Matt founded 'The Good of the Hive' with the goal of hand-painting 50,000 honey bees around the world – the number in a healthy, thriving hive. His project highlights not just the importance of bees to our environment but also the deeper metaphor of interconnectedness. The hive, with its collective intelligence and communal strength, serves as a perfect representation of our shared responsibility to care for the planet and each other. Matt's philosophy perfectly underlines Abbotsleigh's 2025 prefect theme, 'Bee Connected', as we work together to create a better world, one that is filled with beauty, collaboration and respect for all.



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



ABBOTSLEIGH

Around Abbotsleigh is a publication for the Abbotsleigh school community.

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Abbotsleigh, it's your Birthday!

We celebrate 140 years of leading, learning and flourishing

Megan Krimmer
Headmistress



As Semester 2 opened, the excitement in the air was palpable – all the fantastic events and celebrations of Semester 1 – including the marvellous, albeit damp, Autumn Fair, the opening of the new Betty Archdale Library, the fabulous inaugural Mother Daughter Dinner, where 900 mums and their daughters danced the night away and the sublime Night of a Thousand Stars music concert

at Sydney's Opera House – had been leading to this very special day: 20 July 2025 – the 140th anniversary of the opening of this magnificent school. What a milestone! What an incredible achievement for our wonderful school that has most certainly stood the test of time.

At the traditional Birthday Assembly on the first Friday of Term 3, as well as paying tribute to Miss Marian Clarke, Abbotsleigh's courageous trailblazer, and all who have contributed to the rich and unique history of our School, the assembly featured guest speaker, AOG Gabriella Pereira (2012). Gabriella, another trailblazer, who began her career as an investment banking analyst before making a bold pivot to pursue her passion for design,

launching her very successful fashion label Beare Park at Australian Fashion Week in 2021.

Demonstrating that Abbotsleigh values highly its strong tradition of strength and excellence and its ability to continue to move forward with eyes firmly on the future of our girls, the assembly also saw the launch of our new Strategic Plan: Abbotsleigh, Present Focused – Future Ready.

Further, the beautiful publication, *Humans of Abbotsleigh*, lovingly compiled by AOG and Director of Research, Dr Alison Gates (Holmes, 1996), and Dr Irini Savvides, together with a group of current Abbotsleigh girls, was launched at the assembly. This splendid book, featured in this edition of *Around Abbotsleigh*, and available in print and online, brilliantly reflects 140 years of the realisation of Marian Clarke's dream – that Abbotsleigh be a school for girls, underpinned by strong Christian values and one that educates the 'whole girl'. Abbotsleigh has been, and continues to be, a school that fosters academic excellence as well as the physical, emotional, social and spiritual development of each girl, enabling them to develop into strong and courageous young women of fine character who make a very positive impact on their world. All these characteristics feature in the very stimulating articles about our girls and our Old Girls in this publication.





At the Birthday Assembly, from left: Deputy Headmistress Victoria Rennie (Gosper, 1987); fashion entrepreneur and guest speaker Old Girl Gabriella Pereira (2012); and Headmistress Megan Krimmer

We are especially proud of our Year 12 girls, whose theme 'Bee Connected' inspired the whole school community in our 140th anniversary year. As a result of their hard work, dedication and resilience, the girls did extremely well in their HSC examinations and are to be warmly congratulated. Abbotsleigh not only placed 11th in the state but was named Top Independent Girls' School in NSW – again! We wish each student in Year 12 2025 every success as she moves beyond the gates of Abbotsleigh and embarks on new and exciting adventures.

Serving others is another important feature of Abbotsleigh that was established by Miss Clarke and continues today. This was demonstrated firmly during our 140th Birthday Assembly – our Old Girls, represented by Abbotsleigh Old Girls' Union Honorary President Ms Sarah Franks (1991), presented a beautiful work of art as a birthday gift to the School. Created by AOG Ms Julia Roberts (1983), this artwork has taken pride of place on the ground floor of the new Betty Archdale Library and is much admired by all. Additionally, FAbbS (Former Abbotsleigh Staff) Group, led by former deputy headmistress Mrs Rosemary Abrahams, donated a gift to Bunda Girls' Secondary School, the Tanzanian school established by AOG Rev Helen Hoskins (1969). We are most grateful indeed for these very generous gifts.

We are equally grateful to our parents, members of our Foundation and members of our wider community who have generously contributed to scholarships and our music and building programs during many events, including the Foundation Gala Event (featured in this magazine) and our Giving Day this year.

The past continued to meet the present throughout Semester 2 with the wonderful Back to School Day and many Old Girls Reunions, all of which spring into life in this edition of *Around Abbotsleigh*. The Back to School Day, organised by the AOGU, was a great success. Old Girls and their relatives, FAbbS and their relatives, celebrated together and experienced guided tours and a glorious Chapel service during which former deputy headmistress and Acting Chaplain Mrs Robyn Claydon delivered a poignant address, and the Abbotsleigh Old



A very fond farewell and best wishes to our long-serving Dean of Senior College, Annette Ware

Girls Choir sang beautifully. This was followed by a scrumptious lunch and the opening of the Old Girls Art Exhibition by AOG Ms Catherine Wilcox (1980) in the Grace Cossington Smith Gallery.

Our school year closed with traditional Speech Day celebrations, where again, past and present came together. We welcomed our new Head of Junior School, Ms Larissa Cameron (who is featured in this issue). At our Senior School ceremony, we welcomed AOG Ms Edwina Bartholomew (2001) as guest speaker and we honoured and farewelled our much-loved and long-serving Dean of Senior College, Mrs Annette Ware. We also farewelled our long-serving Honorary President of the AOGU Ms Sarah Franks and Honorary Secretary Mrs Fiona Hobill Cole (Armstrong, 1981), as well as our long-serving Presidents of the Abbotsleigh Boarder Parents' Association, Mrs Kylie Woods and Mrs Katrina Cogan. We are incredibly appreciative and thankful for the dedication and hard work of these women.

Truly, 2025 was a year of remarkable celebrations and, as I invite you to remember some of the joyful moments of Semester 2 captured in this fabulous publication, I leave you with these words, recited by Mrs Robyn Claydon at our 140th Birthday Assembly:

'We have walked a long way since 20 July 1885, when 11 boarders, 22 day girls and a far-seeing headmistress started the Abbotsleigh journey. It is a journey which many thousands have undertaken and on which many more will embark. It is a journey characterised by constantly changing scenery and travelling companions and one which enriches the lives of those who undertake it.'

I wonder what Miss Clarke would think of the incredible school she established and how it has grown, developed and flourished over the past 140 years? I think she would be mightily and justifiably very proud.

Happy Birthday, Abbotsleigh – we certainly all believe Miss Betty Archdale's famous mantra: 'With education, women can do and be anything'.



140 years of learning, leading and flourishing!

We reflect on the celebrations around Abbotsleigh's extraordinary milestone birthday



On Friday 25 July, the Abbotsleigh community came together to celebrate an extraordinary milestone – the School's 140th birthday. The celebrations honoured Abbotsleigh's proud legacy of empowering young women, while also reflecting the spirit of connection and community that we have encouraged through this year's prefect theme – 'Bee Connected'.

Celebrations began with a whole-school assembly, where students from both campuses gathered across three venues to reflect on the School's journey thus far. Highlights included musical performances, beautiful student-made cakes and a powerful address by Gabriella Pereira (AOG 2012), founder of fashion label BEARE PARK. Gabriella shared her journey from Abbotsleigh to entrepreneurship, reminding students of the importance of courage and conviction when it comes to making your dreams come true.

Former deputy headmistresses Mrs Robyn Claydon and Mrs Rosemary Abrahams shared their reflections, and special gifts were presented to the School. The assembly also marked the launch of *Humans of Abbotsleigh*, a

wonderful new publication curated by Dr Alison Gates, celebrating the stories of students, staff and community members who have shaped the School across its 140 years.

Later that afternoon we hosted a record number of guests at the Marian Clarke Society's annual Black and Gold Lunch. Welcoming Old Girls of all ages, the lunch was filled with good vibes and shared recollections of attendees' time at Abbotsleigh. Gabriella Pereira once again addressed the guests, alongside Marian Clarke Society President Penelope Thompson and several Year 11 students, who shared reflections on their families' multi-generational connections to the School. The lunch was a sensational testament to the strength of the Abbotsleigh community – intergenerational, interdependent and deeply engaged.

Across all the special birthday celebrations that have occurred this year, we've seen our community come together and perfectly reflect exactly what our founder, Marian Clarke, had always hoped Abbotsleigh would become: a place where girls – past, present and future – are empowered to learn, lead and flourish.



140th birthday assembly





Humans of Abbotsleigh

A very special book that celebrates our people, our community and our stories. By Alison Gates, Director of Research, Learning Engagement and Partnerships



Humans behind *Humans of Abbotsleigh*: Back row, from left: Dr Alison Gates, Audrey and Dr Irini Savvides; middle row, from left: Kaitlyn and Kylie; front row, from left: Sophia, Angeline and Eleanor. (All girls pictured were in Year 11 in 2025)

As part of Abbotsleigh's 140th birthday celebrations, we were proud to launch a very special project: *Humans of Abbotsleigh*. More than just a book, it is a tapestry of voices, faces and memories that reflect the heart of our School community.

The idea was born during a visit to the National Archives in Canberra with a group of Abbotsleigh students, where a wall of faces sparked a question: 'What if we could tell the story of Abbotsleigh through the people who have shaped it?' Inspired by the storytelling style of *Humans of New York*, the project set out to capture glimpses of students, staff, Old Girls and community members who have lived out the School's Values across generations.

Led by an extraordinary group of students assisted by Dr Alison Gates and Dr Irini Savvides, the editorial team combed through archives, recreated photographs and wrote stories that bring our heritage to life. They worked tirelessly – researching, photographing, writing and even producing videos – to ensure the book reflects the richness and diversity of Abbotsleigh's history.

Their dedication was supported by Dr Jennifer McLaren in the Archives and our talented Publications Team, especially graphic designer Michaela Gibiec, whose creative energy shaped the final product.

The result is a beautiful book that celebrates faith, resilience and community. It is filled with heartfelt stories, stunning portraits and archival images that remind us that a school is more than bricks and mortar – it is its people and their shared values. In its digital form, the book is a birthday gift to the whole community, enriched with videos, music and galleries that add depth to the printed edition. You can access the free digital version of the book [here](#).

The first print run sold out during our 140th birthday celebrations and Back to School Day – a testament to the love and pride this community feels for its history. We have since had the book reprinted so if you would like to secure a physical copy, you can do so here: <https://events.humanitix.com/2026-humans-of-abbotsleigh>.

Happy Birthday, Abbotsleigh – and thank you to everyone who helped weave this beautiful story of who we are.



Meet Larissa Cameron, our Head of Junior School

With her belief in nurturing the whole child, Larissa wants every girl to feel known, valued and inspired to thrive academically and personally

From the moment she arrived, new Head of Junior School Ms Larissa Cameron says she felt a strong sense of connection – a feeling that speaks to the welcoming spirit of Abbotsleigh Junior School. Commencing her new role in Term 4 2025, Larissa says the warmth of the staff, the curiosity and kindness of the girls, and the strong sense of community all made her feel at home very quickly.

‘There’s something very special about the culture here: it’s welcoming, purposeful and deeply grounded in values that resonate with me,’ she says. ‘There’s a tangible sense of community and purpose that makes Abbotsleigh Junior School a truly special place.’

Along with its outstanding reputation, Larissa said it was the School’s deep commitment to the whole child that drew her to Abbotsleigh. ‘I wholeheartedly align with the School’s focus on nurturing both academic excellence

and personal growth,’ she says. ‘I believe that a truly great education develops the mind, heart and character.’

According to Larissa, fond memories of her own school experience during her formative years had instilled in her a deep appreciation for the power of girls’ education. ‘I’m passionate about encouraging girls to find their voice, back themselves, be bold and curious and develop the self-assurance to know they can do great things and make a meaningful impact.’

Larissa’s vision is to lead a junior school where every girl feels known, valued and inspired to thrive academically, socially, emotionally and spiritually. ‘I believe in nurturing the whole child,’ she says, ‘and I’m passionate about creating a learning environment that is both intellectually rigorous and deeply caring. I aspire to see every girl grow as a courageous learner, a creative thinker and a compassionate citizen, equipped to make a meaningful impact in the world.’

Some Fun Facts about Ms Larissa Cameron

Hobbies I love exercising with friends, whether it’s a walk and talk or a fun and social dance class

Pets Yes! I have an adorable white cat named Panda (with black spots, of course)

Favourite food Avocado on fresh bread

Ideal holiday destination Italy – for the history, the coffee, the food and the beauty

Where did you grow up? I grew up in Castle Hill, then moved to Diamond Valley in Victoria and later returned to Sydney, where I’ve lived in Maroubra, Northbridge, Coogee and I’m now based in Leichhardt

Favourite subject at school and why? Modern History. I’ve always been fascinated by human behaviour and loved learning about how people lived and interacted in the past, whether it be 19th-century Russia, China or Cuba



She is committed to fostering a culture of excellence in teaching and learning, underpinned by evidence-informed practice, high expectations and a love of learning. At the same time, Larissa believes wellbeing and character development are essential foundations for success.

‘I hope to continue strengthening programs that support resilience, empathy, leadership and personal growth, ensuring that every girl develops the confidence to embrace her unique strengths and voice,’ she says.

With connection also at the heart of her vision, Larissa says last year’s prefect theme ‘Bee Connected’ beautifully captured the importance of relationships in a thriving school community.

‘When students feel a strong sense of belonging and purpose, they flourish,’ she says. ‘Together with dedicated staff and supportive families, I look forward to shaping a future that honours tradition, embraces innovation and celebrates the joy of learning and growing together.’



Bee Kind

By rethinking the Cinderella fairytale, Transition girls learnt to think critically about fairness, inclusion and kindness, reports Junior School Classroom Teacher Mary Santone

Throughout the year, the Transition girls have been on a journey of exploring what it truly means to Bee Kind – to ourselves, to others and to the world around us. Through a literacy inquiry into the traditional story of *Cinderella*, the girls engaged in meaningful reflection about fairness, empathy and the power of words and actions. Together, they considered the choices of the stepmother and stepsisters, questioning how kindness might transform the story.

With curiosity and compassion, the girls reimagined *Cinderella* as a story of inclusion – one that celebrates care, respect and understanding. This process invited the girls to think deeply and critically, to share diverse perspectives and to express their thoughts through language, storytelling and collaboration.

As co-constructors of their learning, the girls demonstrated their connectedness to each other and the wider community. The highlight of their reflections and shared ideas inspired them to create their very own Cinderella Kindness Day, a celebration of the values they continue to live and learn together. On our Day of Kindness, the Transition girls took on meaningful roles of service and care – collecting lunch orders for other classes, creating friendship bracelets to exchange with one another and offering support to their peers during recess and lunch. As the girls extend their thinking beyond their classroom, they continue to nurture a sense of community through our Generational Program, visiting residents at the local nursing home and sharing moments of joy and connection across generations.

Planting the seeds of kindness through a Christian lens has been a beautiful journey to witness – one where compassion, empathy and respect are not only taught but lived. These early acts of kindness continue to grow and flourish, lighting the path of the girls' ongoing learning journey at Abbotsleigh.



The joy of learning

Our educational philosophy wrapped up in fun, creativity and understanding, write Junior School Classroom Teachers Sophie Burnett, Kim Fyffe, Cassandra Oates and Matthew Wood

In bursts of vibrant colour, Year 2 commenced their Celebration of Learning with a joyous flurry of excitement and memory-making moments. The front of our Junior School Library was transformed into a carnival of colour and movement as students explored a variety of circus-themed activities. From towering stilts to the graceful flutter of coloured scarves, the fun never stopped.

With jubilation, students wheeled their way across the plaza on pedal rollers, tested their coordination with juggling sticks and enjoyed fast-paced shooting and catching games with classmates and parents alike. Bringing to life their reading unit for the term, based on Angela McAllister's book *Leon and the Place Between*, it was truly a celebration of movement, creativity and spirit.

In the Library Big Top, the girls stepped into the whimsical world of circus costume design. Inspired by the vibrant creativity of Cirque du Soleil, they collaborated with their peers and parents to imagine and sketch their own costumes. Their ideas were wonderfully inventive and full of flair, reflecting a rich blend of imagination and individuality.

Following this activity, Year 2 enthusiastically took part in an immersive experience designed to help them understand the daily challenges faced by Aayasta, the World Vision child their class supports, in accessing clean water. Isn't this something we often take for granted?

In the lead-up to this experience, students in Christian Studies learnt about Aayasta: where she lives, who she is as a person and how her family accesses water in their rural village in Nepal. At the same time, in Science, Year 2 explored the properties and importance of water. They examined the water cycle, how we use and clean water, and its essential role in hygiene.

This cross-curricular learning helped the girls appreciate the purpose behind the challenge. They reflected on the experience, developing a deeper understanding and genuine empathy for the difficulties people such as Aayasta face each day.

The Year 2 Celebration of Learning was a poignant occasion, and a true embodiment of our educational philosophy of 'nothing without joy'.



Kindness Day

By 'Bee-ing Connected', Year 4 has been spreading kindness across our hive, write Year 4 Coordinator Sarah Vincent and Classroom Teacher Joanne Jones



'No act of kindness, no matter how small is ever wasted' – Aesop

Throughout Term 4, Year 4 were focusing on kindness. Inspired by the famous Dalai Lama quote, 'Be kind whenever possible. It is always possible', our students were challenged at the start of term to prioritise acts of kindness, and to do so without expecting praise or reward. Year 4 girls have lifted one another up by writing kindness letters, decorating compliment buckets and working together as a grade to create kindness mottos and murals.

On International Kindness Day in November, our Year 4 girls embraced the spirit of compassion and connection through a series of meaningful activities designed to foster empathy and a sense of belonging. This special day was not only about spreading kindness but also about understanding its deeper value. True kindness often lives in the smallest gestures, simple acts that, together, can be transformative.

Parents were warmly invited to join in, making the event a positive and affirming experience for the entire school community. Highlights of the day included:

Kindness rocks: Students wrote uplifting messages on stones and placed them around the school gardens.

These hidden treasures serve as gentle reminders that small acts of kindness can brighten someone's day as true kindness does not need recognition or thanks to be meaningful.

Paper woven hearts: Working in pairs, students created beautiful woven hearts, reinforcing teamwork and the joy of collaboration. This activity celebrated the power of putting kind words into action and having a positive impact on others.

Affirmation bracelets: Each student designed a bracelet with words of self-compassion, encouraging them to carry kindness within themselves every day.

Through these activities, the girls explored the power of words and actions, learning how empathy can transform relationships and create a safe, inclusive classroom environment. Our goal was to celebrate every individual for their unique talents and strengths, ensuring that everyone feels they truly belong.

International Kindness Day reminded us that kindness is a choice we can make every day – and its ripple effect can strengthen the bonds within our school and beyond. It was truly an event where 'Bee-ing Connected' mattered.



Who is a true CheerLEADER?

Someone with a good heart, who supports, uplifts and celebrates others, say Year 6 Coordinator Brittany Carrington and Junior School Classroom Teacher Kristen Pollock

In Year 6, leadership is not about standing in front – it is about standing beside others and leading with heart. This year, our students have explored what it means to be true CheerLEADERS – supporting, uplifting and celebrating others, while staying grounded in their values. Guided by the 2025 Year 12 Prefects' theme, 'Bee Connected', the girls have embraced the belief that we are always better together.

Being a CheerLEADER is more than waving a pompom, it is about using your voice to make others feel seen and valued. Leadership is not about being in the spotlight, it is about shining it on others. Together, the girls have discovered the power of encouragement and the importance of never admiring quietly – learning to call out the good they see and celebrate one another's strengths.

This was beautifully demonstrated in the modern ode poems that the students composed in Term 4, expressing praise, celebration and deep appreciation for someone special in their lives. The cheer we give is the cheer we get, and small acts of kindness and positivity create ripples far beyond the classroom.

Central to our discussions has been the metaphor of the peach: warm and fuzzy on the outside – kind, empathetic, approachable and nurturing – yet strong at the core. This core represents a moral centre defined by courage, integrity and the confidence to do what is honest and right, not what is easy. To be the peach is to lead with both compassion and conviction.

A highlight of the program was the Year 6 Fundraiser, where students collaborated in teams to design and deliver creative initiatives for the school community. Each girl identified her unique teamwork persona – whether organiser, encourager, problem-solver or visionary – and contributed her strengths to a shared goal. The result was a vibrant display of teamwork, creativity and service, perfectly reflecting the idea that we are indeed better together.

To be a CheerLEADER is to notice others, lift them higher and celebrate every effort – big or small. When we lead with heart and a strong core, we can be CheerLEADERS in any community we join. Through every cheer, every act of kindness and every brave moment, Year 6 has shown

that leadership is about connection, courage and joy – lessons that will last a lifetime.

In the words of our Year 6 CheerLEADERS' theme song:

*We're better in this together
As a team, we are strong
And there's no doubt about it
We're better in this together
And it shows when we stand hand in hand
Our dreams will expand.*



The Resilience Project

At Abbotsleigh, wellbeing is of paramount importance. Liz Cannon, Director of Wellbeing and Counselling, introduces our newest project

Wellbeing refers to a person’s capacity to thrive across all areas of life – emotional, social, physical, cognitive and spiritual. It involves engagement, connection, purpose and resilience, enabling individuals to manage adversity and experience a sense of fulfilment and growth.

Wellbeing is paramount at Abbotsleigh. Through our robust and consistent focus on wellbeing, our girls are strongly supported to learn, grow, adapt and flourish so they make a positive impact on the world today and tomorrow. We fully understand the inseparable connection between wellbeing and learning and wellbeing and life. This connection is illustrated in these diagrams. Our Wellbeing Framework acknowledges the strong interdependence between wellbeing and academic achievement, connection, empowerment and flourishing in life. Abbotsleigh’s Learning Framework emphasises the importance of transferable skills that prepare our girls to be strong, resilient learners.

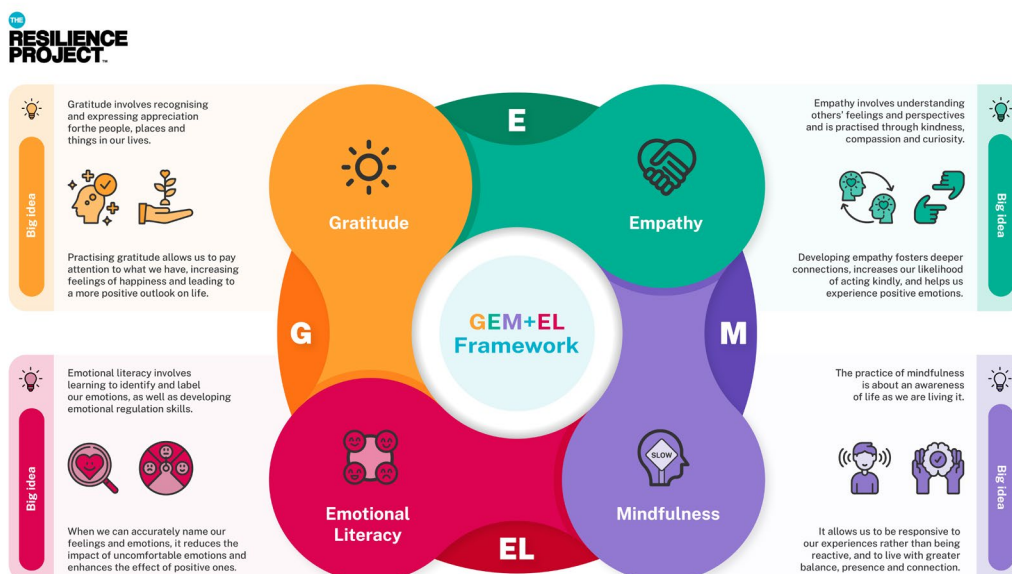
To complement our extensive wellbeing programs, this year we have introduced The Resilience Project (TRP) in the Senior School and will integrate TRP into Pre K-12 in 2026.

What is The Resilience Project?

TRP is a whole-school wellbeing initiative designed to build resilience, emotional literacy and positive mental-health habits among students, staff and families. It is built on evidence-based principles and delivered through a year-long curriculum with age-appropriate lessons and teacher resources. It also involves professional learning for staff and staff wellbeing; family engagement and resources; and ongoing measurement of how our girls are tracking in each year group. **(The Resilience Project)**

TRP’s philosophy is that resilience can be developed through regular practice of positive-emotion strategies, emotional awareness and relational skills. The framework that guides TRP centres on the acronym **GEMEL: Gratitude, Empathy, Mindfulness and Emotional Literacy.**

Gratitude (G) Practising gratitude means noticing and acknowledging the good and positive things in our lives – big or small – instead of focusing on what is going wrong and the negatives. To support this process the following practices are beneficial: gratitude journaling; writing three good things that happened each day, WWW (what went well today); discussion at the dinner table;



HTGS (Hunt the Good Stuff); and starting each day in the classroom with a reflection on one thing that has gone well or for which you are grateful. Research on positive emotion shows that when people frequently experience gratitude, they report higher life satisfaction, greater resilience, better relationships and lower levels of depressive symptoms. TRP emphasises this practice as a foundational habit of wellbeing. **(The Resilience Project+1)**

Empathy (E) Empathy is the ability to understand and share another person’s feelings and perspectives. It involves ‘walking in someone else’s shoes’, noticing and recognising how they might feel, and responding with genuine care, compassion, inclusivity and respect. Empathy builds social connection, reduces isolation, fosters supportive classroom culture and strengthens student-student and student-teacher relationships. TRP identifies empathy as a key driver of positive emotion and relational wellbeing. **(The Resilience Project)**

Helping girls to check in with friends, recognise when someone is struggling, sad or being left out and then offering help, being kind and reflecting on others’ perspectives are all essential for respectful connections.

Mindfulness (M) Mindfulness is the capacity to be present – aware of thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations and the environment, without being overwhelmed or reactive. We tend to worry about what happened in the past and what might happen in the future, so being mindful and being present helps us to remain calmer and manage our feelings better to avoid becoming anxious. Learning some good relaxation techniques, such as slow breathing exercises, guided imagery, noticing five things around you or reflecting on one’s emotional state before action, are important skills to help promote self-regulation, focus attention and calm oneself. These skills support both learning, through focus and persistence and wellbeing, through calmness and resilience.

(The Resilience Project+1)

Emotional Literacy (EL) Emotional Literacy underpins the GEM pillars. It refers to the ability to recognise, label and manage emotions – your own and others’ – and to express and act appropriately. In practice: emotion self-check-ins, using appropriate ‘emotion vocabulary’, being able to self-regulate, delay gratification and build resilience.

Emotional literacy gives the ‘language’ and self-awareness to regulate, reflect and act appropriately. TRP emphasises this as foundational. **(The Resilience Project)**

This comprehensive TRP framework of GEMEL: notice good things (gratitude), connect with others (empathy),

regulate and be present (mindfulness) and understand emotions (emotional literacy) are integral for wellbeing. When girls regularly practise these skills, they can build stronger emotional and relational connections, enhance their resilience and enhance their capacity for learning and life.

Why TRP?

There are three key reasons we have introduced TRP into Abbotsleigh:

As a school, we are proactively aiming to equip the girls with the skills needed to enhance their wellbeing and help improve their mental health. The research from TRP states: ‘One in four primary students in Australia experiences high levels of depression or anxiety’ and ‘one in three secondary students in Australia experiences high levels of depression or anxiety.’ **(The Resilience Project)**

There has been an independent evaluation of the effectiveness of TRP showing that ‘students participating in the TRP School Wellbeing Program showed a 47% reduction in depressive symptoms and 34% reduction in anxiety symptoms after six years’. **(The Resilience Project+1)**. The program has been evaluated by institutions including the University of Melbourne and has been mapped to national wellbeing standards. **(The Resilience Project+1)**

Secondly, as well as being evidence-based, TRP outcomes are measurable. Having evidence and data means we can integrate wellbeing metrics into our planning process to align with our strategic plan and to evaluate progress over time.

Thirdly, TRP aligns strongly with our School Values, our strategic mission and our culture. Abbotsleigh’s values of Integrity, Respect, Compassion, Courage and Perseverance are important guiding principles. The language of Gratitude, Empathy, Mindfulness and Emotional Literacy align well with these values. Furthermore, by strengthening student wellbeing we build on our strategic goals of connectedness, belonging and growth-mindset. TRP also strengthens our overall wellbeing with stronger connections of respect kindness and a shared language of emotional awareness across the whole school community.

The introduction of TRP at Abbotsleigh is a strategic, values-aligned and evidence-informed decision. It strongly supports our mission that student wellbeing is foundational to learning and life: when students feel supported, connected, emotionally literate and resilient, they learn more deeply, engage more fully, live more purposefully and can flourish.



Books and Beyond: A Celebration of Storytelling

This truly inspiring event connected girls across the Junior and Senior Schools with the wider Abbotsleigh community, writes Karen Seeneevassen, Head of Library and Learning Enrichment

The theme of this year's Celebration of Storytelling took inspiration from the 2025 prefect theme of 'Bee Connected'. When Head Prefect Jazarah Tambyrajah introduced the theme to the school at Assembly, she explained: 'Our connections are the foundation of everything we do, from our personal relationships to our broader school community.' Her statement became the throughline of Books and Beyond: A Celebration of Storytelling.

Throughout the week, Senior School students were connected through books and reading, while being introduced to exceptional authors who took the girls beyond their books and into their creative world and practice. Over the course of the event, we were entertained and enlightened by poets, fiction and non-fiction authors.

Year 8 and Year 9 students were treated to a poetry panel, featuring poet, literary critic, editor and academic Felicity Plunkett, multi-award-winning poet Eileen Chong and founder and artistic director of the Bankstown Poetry Slam, Sara Mansour. As Year 7 were studying Eileen's Chong poetry as part of their English program, they were treated to a special session with Eileen, along with another session with Wai Chim, author of books for children and young adults, including the popular title *The Surprising Power of a Good Dumpling*.

Year 11 students participated in the session Writing Women into History, presented by Linda Jaivin, an internationally published author, cultural commentator, essayist, translator, novelist and specialist writer on China. Vivian Pham, fiction author, poet and university

student, shared her writing experiences with Extension English students. It was inspiring to hear her story of writing her novel, *The Coconut Children* (2020), in high school and how this inspired her English Extension 2 journey. Finally, Felicity Castagna, award-winning author, teacher and academic, shared her insights on writing creative non-fiction and strategies for discursive writing.

Junior School students also had the exciting opportunity to hear about the writing journeys of some of their favourite authors. Eva Amores and Matt Cosgrove – creators of *The Worst Week Ever* and *Macca the Alpaca* – shared their drawing and writing tips in an engaging and humorous session. The girls were thoroughly entertained by author R A Spratt, who presented her hilarious Nanny Piggins version of *Cinderella* and captivated students with tales of Friday Barnes. Ashleigh Barton inspired students by sharing how story ideas can come from the most unexpected places, including her inspirational road to publication. Pip Harry explained how she developed the ideas for her new picture books and shared the true story that inspired her award-winning novel *August and Jones*.

Sue Whiting was a hit with younger students, thanks to her interactive Story Thingy. She also captivated older students with insights into how she collects ideas and uses research to craft suspenseful, page-turning crime and mystery stories. A final highlight of the Books and Beyond celebration was a sketching session with author and illustrator Aura Parker, which included the exciting book cover reveal of her third Bowerbird book, *Bowerbird Bloom*.

We were privileged to host a morning tea for published Abbotsleigh Old Girls authors, including Kate Forsyth



Macca the Alpaca co-creator: Matt Cosgrove



(Humphrey, 1984); Belinda Murrell (Humphrey, 1981); Greta Archbold (Brown, 1967); Wendy Blaxland (1967); Louise Fowler-Smith (1973); Alexandra Joel (1971); Elizabeth Lancaster (Carroll, 1977) and Meg Matthews (Giblin, 1960). Books by all of these authors, along with authors from the Abbotsleigh community, are now included in the new Abbotsleigh Community Collection within the Betty Archdale Library, which was introduced earlier this year.

A highlight of the Celebration of Storytelling was the Senior School Assembly with renowned authors, siblings and Old Girls, Belinda Murrell and Kate Forsyth, in conversation with Head Prefect Jazarah Tambyrajah. Students and staff alike were captivated to hear about Belinda and Kate's passion for reading, writing and research, which revived memories of favourite books and rekindled the feelings and emotions these memories create. The relevance of the Books and Beyond theme was highlighted in the conversation about their recent co-authored work of historical research and memoir, *Searching for Charlotte* (2020). This tells the story of Australia's first children's author, Charlotte de Waring Atkinson, who was



Belinda and Kate's great-great-great-great grandmother. Their presentation underscored the importance of being connected to family and community and left such a positive impression for all who were present.

Meeting authors, hearing their stories and exploring the creative process brings books to life. Watching our students connect with authors and stories in such a meaningful way is a reminder of how storytelling can inspire, connect and empower readers. Books and Beyond: A Celebration of Storytelling was truly a celebration of the joy of reading, connecting our students and school community, and strengthening our foundation through literature and stories.

Celebration of Storytelling: Day 1



Inspiring: author Ashleigh Barton



Author and poet Eileen Chong



Tales of Friday Barnes from creator R A Spratt

Celebration of Storytelling: Day 2



Old Girl authors Alexandra Joel (1971), Elizabeth Lancaster (Carroll, 1977), Meg Matthews (Giblin, 1960), Kate Forsyth (Humphrey, 1984), Wendy Blaxland (1967), Louise Fowler-Smith (1973), Belinda Murrell (Humphrey, 1981) and Greta Archbold (Brown, 1967)



Abbotsleigh Old Girl authors and sisters Kate Forsyth (Humphrey, 1984) and Belinda Murrell (Humphrey, 1981)



Visiting author Vivian Pham

Celebration of Storytelling: Day 3



Strategies for discursive writing shared by Felicity Castagna



Author and illustrator Aura Parker



FINE DINING

Dining together, enjoying good food and good company, is an important social ritual and so good for our wellbeing. Abbotsleigh's new Dining Precinct provides a wonderful new venue for everyone



Set to become the new 'heart' of the Senior School, students and staff were excited for the opening of the Abbotsleigh Dining Precinct at the commencement of the 2026 school year. As well as being centrally located on the Senior School campus, the new café/dining facility is a modern, light-filled and welcoming space that is certain to become a popular hub for many years to come.

'It is a magnificent addition to our School and I would like to thank Director of Compliance Mr Greg Fisher, Director of Finance and Business Services Mr Ross Bowden, our Catering team and our School Council very much indeed for their dedication and phenomenal hard work in making this wonderful facility possible for our girls,' Headmistress Mrs Megan Krimmer said.

The vision is for the space to be used throughout the day by both students and staff for a variety of purposes as well as for school events and functions, according to Mrs Krimmer. With a combination of dining table and lounge seating options, the new indoor dining area has the capacity to seat 300. An expansive landscaped

outdoor area, which is due for completion by the end of Term 1, is set to extend the Dining Precinct with an easy transition from the inside to the outside dining spaces.

Head of Boarding Mrs Katie White said the boarding community couldn't be any more excited to begin using the new facility. 'I love that boarders and day girls will be able to share the same dining space, allowing for an even greater connection between the girls,' Mrs White said. 'Being located much closer to the boarding houses means easier access, which will be especially appreciated on cold and rainy nights!'

According to Mrs White, the new bridge between the Senior School Betty Archdale Library and new cafeteria is an important link. 'It will allow our boarders to move effortlessly from prep [homework time] in the library to dinner and then back to prep again afterwards with minimal disruption,' she said. 'We can't wait for the boarding community to start making a whole new mix of special memories in our new dining space!'

'There is no love sincerer than the love of food...'

So said George Bernard Shaw in 1903, and the sentiment endures

The new Dining Precinct replaces a well-loved Abbotsleigh Dining Room, which has been frequented by students and staff, particularly boarders, for nearly a century. According to Abbotsleigh Archivist Dr Jennifer McLaren, the original schoolhouse (now known as the Marian Clarke Building) was built in 1898 and contained a dining room and kitchen quarters where 'house girls' (now known as boarders) and resident staff ate.

'The building was completely remodelled in 1930, with a three-storey block built; in the basement (where Information and Technology is now located) was a gymnasium and above that a new dining room to seat 200 (which is now the current Dining Room),' she said. 'The new kitchen was fitted with gas cooking, hot water and porcelain sinks.'

Dr McLaren said the Dining Room and kitchen were modernised in 1977 and had remained relatively unchanged since, until being repainted a bright white only a few years ago.



The Dining Room, circa 1904

As the daily gathering place for decades of boarders, it is no surprise the Dining Room holds many special memories – here we share some anecdotes from the 1980s and 1990s vintage of boarders:



Dining Room 1920s



Dining Room 1930, Marian Clarke wing

Abbotsleigh Boarders' Council Dress Up Nights with themes such as 'come dressed as something starting with the first letter of your name' and the 'Night for Nyngan floods fundraiser' in 1990, resulting in characters from the Muppets to Smurfs to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles all dining together.

A rite of passage for Year 7 boarders at dinner (having been 'encouraged' to do so by the Year 12s) included finding the courage to approach staff seated on the stage and requesting any 'spare' ice-cream (always Neapolitan flavoured). It was then wildly whipped into a thick shake (again to the disapproval of the senior boarding staff on duty).

Oddly, eggs for breakfast were routinely given a similar treatment: two peeled hard-boiled eggs along with a mountain of margarine, salt and pepper were all thrown in a mug and madly chopped with a knife before spreading on toast.

Wednesdays were roast nights and when the Headmistress at the time, Mrs Diane Nicholls, and her family joined the boarders for dinner. This was somewhat unfortunate timing for the Nicholls family, given the deafening noise created as more than 150 girls simultaneously transformed their meals into 'bubble and squeak' by frantically dicing their roast meat and veggies and then mixing with Gravox ... until the process was often abruptly ended with a senior boarding staff member standing and yelling: 'Girls! Enough!'

Memorable meals included Sara Lee croissants served for breakfast with 'I'm rejected and neglected but I'm still good to eat!' stickers stuck to the packaging; warm custard served with a layer of skin so thick it could only be removed after mastering the skill of using the back of a serving spoon; hot cheese rolls served on unique doughnut-shaped rolls (the likes of which had never been seen before, or again); Vegemite rolls with salt 'n' vinegar chips; curried sausages... and pea fights!

Year groups regularly dressed up and performed fun skits and dances on the Dining Room stage purely for the enjoyment of the 'scary Year 12s' of the time.

An inaugural Boarders' Dinner in 1993 when Abbotsleigh Year 12 boarders hosted Shore, Kings, Knox and Riverview boarders for dinner with a very different vibe!

Many remember using the public pay phone located directly outside the Dining Room entrance to make sometimes teary 'reverse charge' homesick phone calls just prior to or immediately following dinner.

Another very important job in Year 7 was to collect the meals, run back to your table, flip the chip-filled trays upside down and race back to get any rare 'seconds' – the aim being to beat your fellow Year 7s and keep your Year 12 table monitor happy.

As well as serving thousands of boarder meals, the Dining Room also hosted a wide range of other school events during its time. Mother Daughter Dinners as well as Generations Breakfasts/morning teas/afternoon teas/high teas and dinners hosted by the Abbotsleigh Old Girls' Union have seen thousands of mothers, daughters, grandmothers, granddaughters, aunts and nieces come together for intergenerational meals.

Countless Old Girl school reunions have been held in the Dining Room with the volume of voices from reunited Old Girls reminiscing about their old school days never failing to impress and amuse anyone who happened to be passing by.

Golden Old Girls Foundation luncheons and later Black and Gold lunches hosted by the Marian Clarke Society

as part of the School's birthday celebrations are just some of the other special events traditionally held in the School Dining Room.

Although there are many tales of creative culinary adventures treasured by generations of Old Girls, the dining experience for today's students tells a very different story. With an exceptional catering team, a focus on wellbeing and nutrition, and the opening of the state-of-the-art Dining Precinct, meals are now fresh, colourful and full of variety. Boarders frequently remark that the food has 'never been better', and the new space ensures that mealtimes continue to be a highlight of their day – not just for the food, but for the sense of community it fosters.

A taste of excellence

Introducing our inaugural IGCSE Food and Nutrition course, by Director of Curriculum and Professional Excellence, Isobel Royston

Abbotsleigh is thrilled to unveil an exciting new chapter in our curriculum with the introduction of the IGCSE Food and Nutrition course, alongside a refreshed Year 7 Technology program and two stunning, purpose-built kitchens. These initiatives reflect our unwavering commitment to providing world-class learning experiences that combine academic rigour with practical, real-world skills.

The IGCSE Food and Nutrition course is an internationally recognised qualification that goes far beyond cooking. It challenges students to explore the science of food, nutrition and health, developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills that will serve them well in future studies and careers. Girls will investigate food composition, dietary needs and sustainability, applying scientific principles to everyday life. This is a course designed for curious minds and future leaders in health, science and innovation.

Our Year 7 Technology course introduces younger students to the fundamentals of food preparation and design thinking. This course encourages innovation and collaboration as girls learn to plan, create and evaluate their dishes, building confidence and competence in a supportive environment. By introducing these concepts to Year 7, Abbotsleigh ensures that students develop a strong foundation in both practical and theoretical aspects of food technology.

To bring these programs to life, Abbotsleigh has invested in two brand-new kitchens. These beautiful purpose-built facilities, equipped with modern appliances and culinary resources, are designed to provide an optimal learning environment. The kitchens will be used extensively by students across many year levels, enabling hands-on experiences that bring classroom theory to life.

The installation of these kitchens reflects Abbotsleigh's belief that authentic learning requires authentic spaces. Food and nutrition education is not simply about cooking; it is about understanding the science, culture and sustainability of what we eat. These kitchens allow our students to experience the joy of cooking while engaging with the academic principles behind nutrition and health. They are spaces where theory meets practice and where girls can develop skills that will empower them for life.

This initiative marks an exciting chapter in Abbotsleigh's curriculum development, combining academic rigour with practical application. We look forward to seeing our students thrive in these new spaces as they discover the art and science of food.

To read about two Old Girls, who have made their careers in the food and hospitality areas, please go to page 56



Mathematics: putting theory into practice

Year 8 put their skills to practical use on the School sports grounds, write Senior School Mathematics Teachers Sarah Israel and Ian Smith



On a beautiful Spring morning in early September, two Year 8 maths classes joined forces in the classroom and outdoors to put their measurement and calculation skills into practice. Abbotsleigh groundskeeper Tim Fitzadam generously gave his time to talk with the girls about his work maintaining the grass on the Top Oval and marking the field for all sorts of sporting activities. The girls were delighted to discover that Tim uses mathematics every day. When fertilising the grass, he uses ratios to get the correct mix of ingredients. When marking the lines for a particular sport, he uses Pythagoras' Theorem to ensure the corners are right angles.

We then headed outside to the Top Oval, which was marked for junior touch football games. The girls measured various lengths and angles with equipment including trundle wheels, tape measures and oversized protractors. The right angles were checked and measurements taken so that areas of rectangles, triangles, parallelograms and circles could be calculated.

Through this exercise, students gained a new appreciation for the relevance of the mathematics they had been learning throughout the year.



Foreign experiences

Language students delved into the cultures of France, Germany and China, and Ancient Greek and Roman worlds during inspiring incursions, writes Head of Senior School Languages, Carole Helbert

Gingerbread houses and German detective work

During the Year 9 German language incursion, students explored Germany's rich culture by researching its iconic cities and cultural highlights, gaining a deeper understanding of life in Germany. After their research, they put their language skills to the test by immersing themselves in the German teen movie *Vorstadt-krokodile 2*. This fun, action-packed film offered an authentic glimpse into the lives of German teenagers. To finish the day on a creative note, students collaborated to design traditional German-style gingerbread houses. This hands-on activity was not only a highlight of the day but also a wonderful way to combine culture, creativity and teamwork.



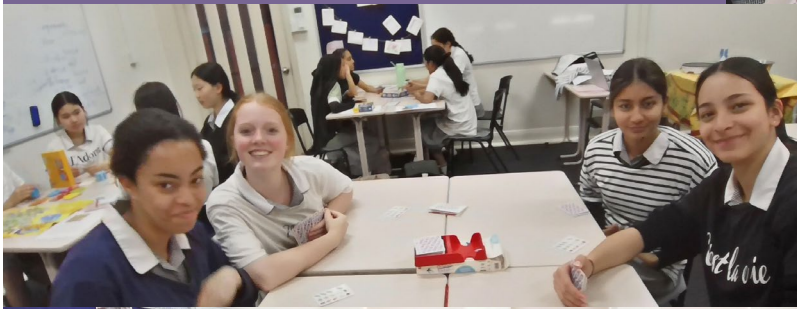
Tai chi and pancakes

Our Chinese language students immersed themselves in a vibrant celebration of Chinese culture. We were honoured to welcome Mr Luo, a tai chi and kung fu master, who guided the girls through calming tai chi movements and shared insights into traditional Chinese wellness practices. The session not only deepened the girls' cultural understanding but also introduced valuable techniques for managing stress and enhancing mental wellbeing.

To top off the day, students enjoyed a delicious taste of China – authentic chive and egg pancakes, freshly prepared by their teacher with help from the students. It was a joyful, hands-on experience that brought language learning to life!

From chansons to La Pérouse

During the Year 9 French incursion, students engaged in a variety of immersive activities designed to deepen their understanding of language and culture. They showcased creativity by composing their own lyrics to a French song, blending linguistic skills with artistic expression. A deep learning challenge encouraged critical thinking as students proofread a document to identify and analyse errors, exploring why mistakes occurred. Culinary culture came alive as they prepared traditional crêpes, while discussions about influential figures such as Nancy Wake, a World War II resistance hero, and explorer La Pérouse provided historical and cultural context. This multifaceted experience combined language, history and hands-on learning in an engaging way.



Ancient riddles and Greek comedy

During Languages Day, Latin students explored various aspects of the Ancient Greek and Roman worlds. After a Mediterranean-inspired breakfast including bread, dips, Greek yoghurt and honey, students participated in an activity typically taught to children at the school of rhetoric thousands of years ago, debating against each other on well-known dilemmas taken from myth and history. After a brief introduction to the world of ancient theatre, its festivals and playwrights, students rehearsed and performed an adapted version of Plautus' influential comedy *Menaechmi* in (almost) full costume. As a conclusion to a busy and enjoyable day, they were introduced to the Greek symposium and some of the games played at ancient parties. Here students competed for prizes by guessing the answers to some famous but challenging ancient riddles.

Exploring France

An unforgettable journey of language and culture, writes Director of Curriculum and Professional Excellence, Isobel Royston

In September, our students embarked on an unforgettable French Tour, immersing themselves in the rich history, vibrant culture and everyday life of France. This experience was designed to deepen their understanding of the French language while providing authentic opportunities to practise speaking in real-world contexts.

The itinerary featured iconic destinations such as Paris, where students marvelled at the Eiffel Tower, cruised along the Seine and explored the artistic treasures of the Louvre. Beyond the capital, the group ventured into picturesque regions, discovering charming villages, historic landmarks and local traditions that brought classroom lessons to life. Highlights included the Palace of Versailles and the cities of Rouen, Caen, St Malo and the Loire Valley.

In Rouen, students explored the legacy of Joan of Arc. They visited the D-Day Landing sites in Normandy, followed by the Caen Memorial Museum. The walled town of St Malo offered a glimpse into medieval history, and the breathtaking Mont Saint-Michel provided a memorable climb to its summit. The tour concluded with

a guided visit to the elegant Chenonceau Castle in the Loire Valley.

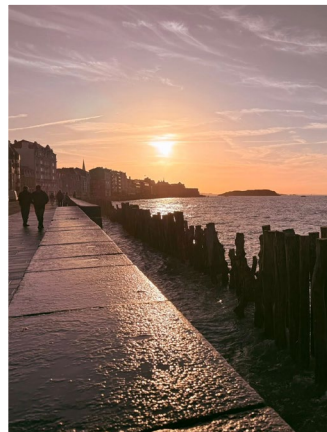
Students enjoyed authentic French cuisine, from freshly baked croissants to regional specialties, and engaged in cultural activities such as visiting markets, attending workshops and interacting with native speakers. These experiences not only enhanced their linguistic skills but also fostered confidence and independence.

The tour reinforced the importance of global perspectives in education. By stepping outside the classroom, students gained a deeper appreciation for French culture and history, strengthening their language proficiency and intercultural understanding.

From navigating the Paris Metro to practising conversational French in cafés, every moment was an opportunity for growth. The trip was filled with laughter, learning and lasting friendships. It was an experience that will remain a highlight of their school year.

Thanks to Carole Helbert (Head of Languages), who organised an amazing trip that allowed the students and support staff attending (Xavier Bernard, Catherine Oliver and myself) to explore many areas of France.





Discovering innovation in the United States

From New York to NASA, a group of lucky Abbotsleigh girls enjoyed a remarkable educational journey, reports Media and Events Manager Kris Egan

During the Term 3 holiday break, a group of lucky Abbotsleigh Years 9, 10 and 11 students embarked on an unforgettable educational adventure across the east coast of the United States – from the bustling streets of New York City to the cutting-edge world of NASA’s Kennedy Space Center in Florida. The tour offered an extraordinary mix of art, culture, design and science, giving students a firsthand look at some of the world’s most iconic landmarks and innovative learning environments.

Exploring art, design and history in New York City

After a long journey from Sydney via San Francisco, the group arrived in the city that never sleeps and quickly immersed themselves in its vibrant energy. Their first full day was spent in New York’s famous Garment District, where they toured M & S Schmalberg – a third-generation

family business that handcrafts exquisite flowers for film, television and fashion. Students had the chance to design and create their own fabric blooms. Later, at the Museum of Arts and Design, the girls explored contemporary exhibitions and created abstract jewellery pieces from unconventional materials.

The artistic inspiration continued at the Museum of Modern Art, where students stood before masterpieces by van Gogh, Picasso and Warhol. From there, they explored the Intrepid Museum, located on a World War II aircraft carrier, and ventured through the USS Growler submarine – an experience that offered a fascinating glimpse into naval life. That evening, they enjoyed a Broadway performance of *Wicked*, a true New York highlight.

Over the next few days, the group saw the city from new perspectives – cruising around Manhattan to admire



landmarks such as the Statue of Liberty, Empire State Building and Brooklyn Bridge, before visiting the deeply moving 9/11 Memorial Museum. The following day brought more learning and discovery at the American Museum of Natural History and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where students explored art and artefacts spanning centuries and cultures.

Their final day in New York included a breakfast in Times Square, a wander through Chelsea Market and a movie-themed bus tour featuring famous filming locations from *Ghostbusters*, *Friends* and *The Avengers*. A surprise detour past Taylor Swift's apartment and a chance meeting with professional tennis player Naomi Johnson made for a memorable farewell to the Big Apple.

Mission: Space – learning at NASA

From New York, the group then travelled to Florida to experience the wonders of space exploration at NASA's Kennedy Space Center. Over three days, students participated in the Space Camp program, which blended real-world science with hands-on learning.

They began with a guided tour of the Space Center, visiting historic launchpads and viewing the enormous Vehicle Assembly Building – still in use for NASA's Artemis missions. Standing beneath the Saturn V rocket and the Atlantis Space Shuttle, students learnt about the evolution of human space travel and heard from

astronaut Robert Cenker about his experiences aboard the shuttle.

The following days saw students take on the roles of astronauts, engineers and mission controllers through a range of immersive activities. They grew microgreens in a Mars botany simulation, operated robotic rovers, and learnt how power and resources are managed on a space station. A talk by decorated Space Force officer Colonel Susie Dabrowski provided inspiration and insight into women's growing roles in STEM and aerospace industries.

Their final day at NASA featured astronaut training simulations, including a Mars VR experience, a microgravity challenge and a rocket launch exercise – all designed to demonstrate the teamwork, precision and endurance required in space exploration. The experience ended on a fun note with an evening of mini golf and alligator spotting at Golf N Gator!

Wrapping up in Orlando

Before returning home, the students enjoyed some lighter adventures in Orlando, visiting WonderWorks and Universal Studios – the perfect way to round out a packed experience in the US. From the creativity of New York's art and fashion scene to the innovation of NASA's Space Camp, the US tour was an unforgettable experience for all involved.



The inaugural Abbotsleigh Integration Bee

Like a spelling bee – but with numbers! – this initiative was a great success, report Senior School Mathematics Teachers Peter Garside and Sarah Israel

Each year Abbotsleigh farewells remarkable students in every Mathematics course. To celebrate their fine achievements and skills, and in keeping with this year's prefect theme 'Bee Connected', the Maths staff created a Term 3 end-of-year maths bee (like a spelling bee, but with numbers): the Abbotsleigh Integration Bee.

Set in the Assembly Hall, with white boards cluttering the stage, teams of students solved HSC-style questions involving calculus and the Normal Distribution.

There were elimination rounds of 16, then eight, then four, and finally a round of two for each Mathematics course – Standard, Advanced, Extension 1 and Extension 2.

Competition was fast, furious and fun, as students worked in small groups to hone their maths skills, cheered on loudly by their peers.

Thank you to the Mathematics staff and Year 12 Tutors who cheerfully supervised the competing teams, timed them and checked their answers. Overall, the inaugural Integration Bee was a great success and we look forward to next year's competition.





ABBOTSLEIGH

Congratulations Year 12 2025



Celebrating the Class of 2025

It has truly been a year of 'Bee-ing Connected'! As Abbotsleigh proudly marked its 140th anniversary, our community reflected on the values that have shaped generations of remarkable young women. This year, those values shone brightly through the achievements of our Year 12 girls.

The Class of 2025 embraced their theme, 'Bee Connected', with grace and determination. Their outstanding HSC results are a testament not only to their academic excellence but also to their collaborative spirit. Supporting one another with empathy and respect, they demonstrated that success is sweetest when shared. Beyond the classroom, these inspiring


young women have led with courage, engaged in service learning, and contributed richly to the co-curricular life of the School, leaving a legacy of integrity and compassion.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to our dedicated staff, whose guidance and care have been instrumental in shaping these graduates into confident and thoughtful leaders. As they step beyond the gates of Abbotsleigh, we know they will continue to follow their dreams, remain true to themselves and make a positive impact on the world.

Congratulations, Year 12 2025! Your journey has been extraordinary, and we cannot wait to see what the future holds.

Mrs Megan Krimmer, *Headmistress*

1 Top independent girls school in the **State**


3  Students with ATAR **99.95**

4  students **First in Course**

14  students on the Top Achievers list

26 students on the All-round Achievers list

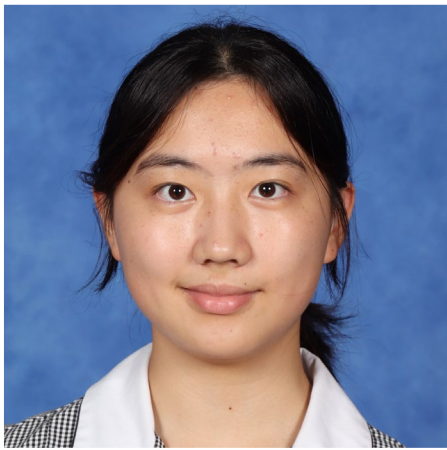



24 students with ATAR of **99 and above**


Ranked 11th in the state

Median ATAR 93.9
NSW Median 70.75

2025 HSC Dux



Sophia Wang

Sophia's exceptional aptitude for languages culminated in the study of Chinese Continuers, Chinese Extension, Latin Continuers and Latin Extension for her HSC. A gifted linguist, she achieved first place in the state for Chinese Continuers and was awarded Abbotsleigh's prestigious Rosemary Goulding Prize for Languages in Year 12. English Advanced and Mathematics Extension 1 and 2 completed her HSC pattern of study. Beyond the classroom, Sophia embraced a rich and varied school life. She contributed extensively to Abbotsleigh's music ensembles, performing with the choir, chamber choir, and clarinet ensemble. She was also a keen softballer, and her curiosity and problem-solving skills shone through as a da Vinci Decathlon participant over many years. Committed to global awareness and cultural diversity, Sophia was also an active member of 'Embrace Global'.



Sylvia Zhang

Sylvia's love of learning and determination to challenge herself were evident throughout her senior years. In 2024, she completed two HSC subjects early, achieving 10th in the state for Mathematics Advanced and 4th for Latin Continuers. In 2025, she complemented these HSC subjects with English Advanced, Mathematics Extension 1 and 2, Chemistry, and Latin Extension. Her exceptional academic ability was recognised with Abbotsleigh's highest honour, the Centenary Dux of the School Prize. A true all-rounder, Sylvia wholeheartedly embraced school life beyond the classroom. A gifted musician, she contributed to the orchestra, jazz band, symphonic winds, choir, clarinet ensemble and band. She represented Abbotsleigh with distinction in debating and demonstrated her passion for science through extensive involvement in Olympiads and the da Vinci Decathlon. In her final year, Sylvia provided inspirational leadership as STEAM Prefect.



Olivia Zhou

Olivia's achievements in Latin are truly outstanding, placing 1st in the state in Latin Extension and 3rd in Latin Continuers. Her academic versatility was further demonstrated by placing 20th in Chemistry, alongside a rigorous HSC program that included English Advanced and Mathematics Extension 1 and 2. These accomplishments reflect both intellectual depth and breadth. Beyond her academic success, Olivia has been an integral part of Abbotsleigh's debating culture, representing the school with distinction in ISDA, Archdale and SDN competitions over many years. Her enthusiasm for critical thinking and communication was matched by her commitment to STEAM, where she actively participated in Olympiads. Olivia exercised leadership as Debating and Public Speaking Prefect during Year 12, encouraging younger students in their pursuit of oratory skill and confidence.

2025 ATAR of 99 and above

- | | | | | | |
|----------------------|-------|------------------|-------|-----------------|-------|
| • Sophia Wang | 99.95 | • Rebecca Yao | 99.8 | • Annie Zhang | 99.35 |
| • Sylvia Zhang | 99.95 | • Beatrice Chung | 99.75 | • Zara Noor | 99.3 |
| • Olivia Zhou | 99.95 | • Evelyn Liu | 99.7 | • Rachel Lam | 99.25 |
| • Sophie Choi | 99.9 | • Skye Yu | 99.55 | • Chloe Zhang | 99.2 |
| • Ashley Nunan | 99.85 | • Harriet Chang | 99.45 | • Lara Valmadre | 99.15 |
| • Isabella Apostolou | 99.8 | • Jessica Li | 99.4 | • Olivia Wood | 99.15 |
| • Christina Leung | 99.8 | • Phoebe Peng | 99.4 | • Davina Chan | 99.1 |
| • Vianna Soh | 99.8 | • Lindsay Lin | 99.35 | • Sahana Jain | 99 |

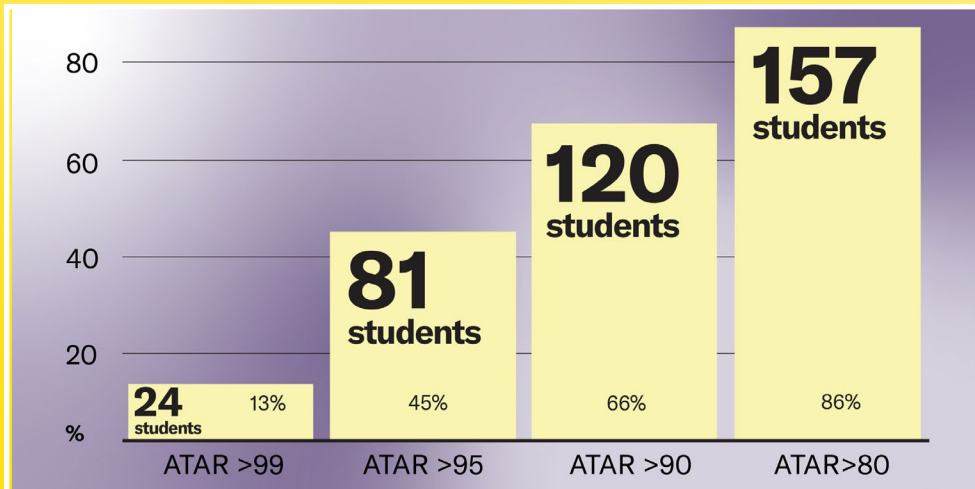
2025 Top Achievers list

- **Isabella Apostolou** – 10th in Modern History
- **Dhaani Gupta** (Year 11) – 1st in Hindi Continuers (studied externally)
- **Maddison Lee-Joe** – 2nd in Biology
- **Christina Leung** – 8th in Business Studies, 19th in Modern History
- **Lindsay Lin** – 2nd in Chinese in Context, 18th in Business Studies
- **Evelyn Liu** – 9th in Biology
- **Jessica Ma** – 5th in Music Extension
- **Abigail Morson** – 3rd in Earth and Environmental Science
- **Arisa Ng** – 4th in Chinese in Context
- **Ashley Nunan** – 2nd in Earth and Environmental Science, 12th in Business Studies
- **Vianna Soh** – 2nd in Biology
- **Lara Valmadre** – 14th in Modern History
- **Sophia Wang** – 1st in Chinese Continuers
- **Emily Yang** – 4th in Korean Beginners (studied externally)
- **Skye Yu** – 1st in Chinese in Context, 2nd in Visual Arts
- **Olivia Zhou** – 1st in Latin Extension, 3rd in Latin Continuers, 20th in Chemistry

All-round Achievers list

- **Isabella Apostolou**
- **Davina Chan**
- **Harriet Chang**
- **Sophie Choi**
- **Beatrice Chung**
- **Anisa Farhod**
- **Sahana Jain**
- **Rachel Lam**
- **Christina Leung**
- **Grace Li**
- **Evelyn Liu**
- **Meera Nirmalendran**
- **Zara Noor**
- **Ashley Nunan**

- **Jocelyn Paterson**
- **Jessica Qi**
- **Vianna Soh**
- **Sophia Wang**
- **Olivia Wood**
- **Rebecca Yao**
- **Skye Yu**
- **Jayla Yuen**
- **Grace Zeng**
- **Chloe Zhang**
- **Sylvia Zhang**
- **Olivia Zhou**



[Click here](#) to view the 2025 Band Summaries



NESA Student showcases



ARTEXPRESS

Nominated

- Abby Corderoy – *Succession*
- Phoebe Fu – *The Unconscious is a Pale Horse*
- Isabella Hills – *In the Wake*
- Luyan Jiang – *The Weight of the Keys*
- Harriet Kaan – *The Anatomy of a Dive*
- Emily Kimpton – 守り猫 (*Mamori Neko*): *Guardian and Heartfelt Companion*
- Demelza Lee – ‘*Claremont: the past in the present*’
- Willa McKay – *Between Decay and Devotion*
- Vivian Pan – *My Grandmother’s Apothecary ... preserving wisdom*
- Sarah Richardson – *Lost, still*
- Catherine Scott – *The subliminal road*
- Sahara Wainwright – *Shapes, shadows and silhouettes*
- Jemma Warden – *Seasons Passed, but They Remained*
- Emily Yang – ‘*Tractor*’: *In play*
- Katie Yoon – *The Outsider’s Geometry: a study of the other*
- Skye Yu – 风雨同舟: *In Search of a Better Life*

Selected

- Daniella Cha – *The Everything drawer: suspended between loss and use*
- Seraphina Li – *Soundwaves of Connection- the thread that binds us*
- Meera Nirmalendran – *Colonial Cargo: the stolen harvest*
- Lola Treseder – *Where the light gets in*
- Zoe Woods – *World at my feet: en plein air*
- Bonnie Xiao – *The Naturalists: Backyard expeditions*
- Fiona Yan – *LIKE A GRRRL*

ENCORE

Music Performance Nominated

- Reanne Alwis
- Eva Bloom
- Davina Chan
- Eloise Lo
- Jessica Ma
- Alina Ramanathan
- Jazarah Tambyrajah

Musicology Selected

- Eloise Lo

Music Composition Nominated

- Chloe Lam

OnSTAGE

Individual Performance Nominated

- Isabel Jennings – *Suddenly last summer*
- Katie Yoon – *Man on the Moon Marigolds*

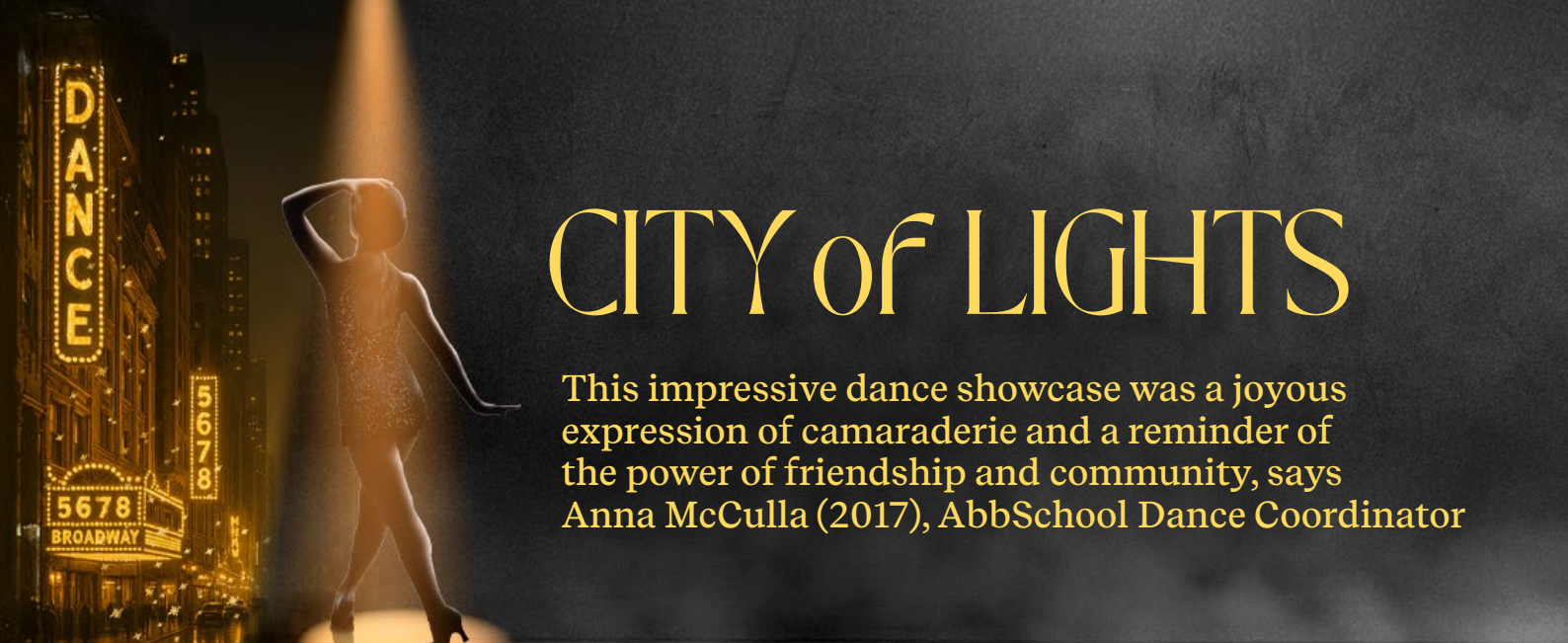
Individual Project Nominated

- Grace Zeng

SHAPE

Design and Technology Nominated

- Charlotte Forrester
- Jeslyn Lim
- Meera Nirmalendran
- Anna Sharp



CITY of LIGHTS

This impressive dance showcase was a joyous expression of camaraderie and a reminder of the power of friendship and community, says Anna McCulla (2017), AbbSchool Dance Coordinator

On 7 and 8 November, more than 250 AbbSchool Dance students lit up the stage in *City of Lights*, the highly anticipated 2025 biennial dance showcase. This year marked a milestone for the program, with the performance held off-campus for the first time at the state-of-the-art Wenkart Theatre – Knox Performing Arts Centre's premier venue.

City of Lights tells the story of a young woman (portrayed by Laura Jones, Year 12) at a turning point in life. Fuelled by curiosity, wonder and a bold spirit, she sets off on a journey of self-discovery. Among the challenges, she finds a true friend (Sophie Cheung, Year 12), reminding us of the power and importance of community and the

support of those around us. In the end, she realises that the light she was following was never far – it was within her all along, enhanced by her new experiences and friendships.

Not unlike the characters portrayed within *City of Lights*, members of the AbbSchool Dance community display qualities of determination, courage, confidence and kindness. For some, the stage can feel like home, and for others this performance marked their first experience on such a scale, performing in front of over 800 people over two evenings. However, what was shared was the genuine camaraderie and love of dance, as you can see from the student reflections here.





'Doing the showcase was so much fun! I loved meeting new people and getting to perform. When I was backstage, I felt nervous and excited at the same time but, once I was on stage, the lights and the cheers made me feel amazing. Thank you for the chance and for the memories I'll never forget!'

Olivia, Year 5

'Being a part of the showcase was an incredible experience that not only gave every dancer the chance to shine on stage but also reflected the unwavering dedication and unity that brought the production to life. Rehearsals were filled with laughter, encouragement and teamwork, all of which made the experience truly unforgettable. I found joy not only in performing, but also in the journey that brought us to the stage. It was inspiring to see how much everyone had grown, both individually and as a team.'

Dineli, Year 10

'As a J Crew member, I've had the time of my life collaborating with such kindhearted girls. The effort my team puts into work like this prompts me to think of what I can do to help them grow. Our teachers have been extremely supportive and I'll eternally be grateful for the success that they helped us make.'

Jacqueline, Year 6



A night to remember

Our 2025 'Bee Connected' Foundation Gala was an outstanding success, writes our Head of Development and Community Relations, Alex Lightfoot (Doherty, 1987)

What an extraordinary evening! The Abbotsleigh Foundation's Bee Connected Gala, held on Saturday 16 August 2025 at Doltone House, Darling Island, was a spectacular celebration of community, generosity and purpose. The stunning waterfront venue, elegant black-tie atmosphere and shared sense of excitement created a truly unforgettable night.

Guests enjoyed drinks and canapés alongside a sensational performance by our talented Saxophone Ensemble, Rija, Nandika (Year 10), Charlotte and Sophia (Year 9).

It was wonderful to welcome so many parents, Old Girls and friends together again in support of Indigenous scholarships and state-of-the-art learning facilities. Back by popular demand, Old Girl co-MCs Laura Tunstall (2001) and Edwina Bartholomew (2001) brought their trademark energy and warmth, while our ever-popular auctioneer Duncan Scheib delivered an outstanding live auction, raising more than \$100,000 for our Indigenous Scholarships Program alone.

The night concluded on a high with dancing to live band Bermuda Social – and thanks to the incredible generosity of our community, an astonishing \$292,060 was raised. This marks the most successful Foundation fundraising event in Abbotsleigh's history, a fitting achievement in the School's 140th year.

We are deeply grateful to everyone who attended, donated, sponsored, volunteered or contributed prizes – your support makes a lasting difference.

Buoyed by the overwhelming success of the evening, we are delighted to confirm the Foundation Gala will return on Saturday 15 August 2026. We look forward to bringing our community together once again for a truly fun and special night. See you there!





Scholarships

Each year the Foundation supports means-tested scholarships that transform lives. These scholarships open the doors to an Abbotsleigh education for girls who, without the generosity of our community, would not have the opportunity to attend Abbotsleigh.

\$344,623 | **13** 

INDIGENOUS SCHOLARSHIPS

\$243,620 | **6** 


BETTY ARCHDALE SCHOLARSHIPS

\$142,790 | **6** 


FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIPS

\$41,970 | **1** 


KATHLEEN McCREDIE AWARDS

\$30,715 | **3** 

ROYLE SCHOLARSHIPS

\$121,810 | **3** 

MOLLIE AND NANCY DOUGLAS SCHOLARSHIPS

\$20,225 | **2** 

EVERETT SCHOLARSHIPS

\$945,753 | **34** 

TOTAL SCHOLARSHIPS FUNDED


Additional Support

Donors to the Foundation can make a gift to the fund of their choice, supporting the areas of the School they feel most passionate about. By coming together as a community, we can build on our strong foundations and create even greater opportunities for girls' education – now and for generations to come.

\$505,000 

STATE-OF-THE-ART FACILITIES

- Senior School Dining Precinct

\$34,505 

FAMILIES EXPERIENCING HARDSHIP

\$12,500 

ABBOX OF FUN CHILDREN PROGRAM

- Caring for children with disabilities

\$7,351 

SPORTS, MUSIC AND ACADEMIC PRIZES

\$1,505,109

TOTAL FUNDS DISTRIBUTED

Our fundraising initiatives span Giving Day, gala events, monthly and workplace giving, our annual appeal, engraved pavers and bequests. These diverse opportunities allow donors to contribute in ways that matter most to them, building lasting support and deepening community engagement.

The Foundation's success is only possible thanks to the incredible generosity of the Abbotsleigh community – current and past parents, Old Girls and staff. Your support makes a tangible difference to our girls' learning every single day. We look forward to working with our donors to grow the impact of the Foundation in 2026 and beyond.

Previous Abbotsleigh Scholarship recipients



ABBOTSLEIGH
FOUNDATION



Olivia Oakeshott (2018-2023)

Indigenous Scholarship

'From the beginning of Year 7, I felt nothing short of blessed to be able to receive an education as phenomenal as the one I received from Abbotsleigh. It is not every girl who gets an opportunity like this, and my experience was nothing short of exceptional. Abbotsleigh allowed me to develop my passions and explore my love for community and helping those around me.'

'Three years on from graduating from Abbotsleigh, I'm now well into my Medicine degree, and I continue to carry the foundations that my scholarship gave me. Abbotsleigh didn't just open the door to opportunity – it taught me how to lead with confidence, curiosity and compassion. At university, I have balanced the demands of medicine with an active role in college life, recently stepping into a leadership position at St Andrew's College.'

Olivia is currently studying Medicine at the University of New South Wales.



Natasha Hodgkinson (2020-2025)

Molly Douglas Scholarship

'Abbotsleigh has given me a strong foundation not only academically but in confidence, independence and self-belief. Receiving a scholarship was an honour and a source of motivation, reinforcing my desire to make the most of every opportunity presented to me while at and now beyond Abbotsleigh. As a boarder, Abbotsleigh became a second home. Living alongside girls from far and wide, we built lifelong friendships. The School encouraged me to balance sport, music and academic commitments, teaching me how to manage my time and work effectively under pressure. It was at Abbotsleigh that I learned I could turn my passion for sport into a career. Supported by many inspiring teachers who guided me every step of the way, I was given incredible opportunities that challenged me to think, grow and lead beyond the classroom.'

Natasha is currently studying a Bachelor of Management (Events and Sport Business) and a Bachelor of Creative Intelligence and Innovation at the University of Technology Sydney.



Nell Owen (2023-2025)

Kathleen McCredie Award

'Abbotsleigh has given me nothing short of everything. I have formed connections that will last a lifetime, created memories and learned more than I ever thought possible. Abbotsleigh has also instilled in me values that I'm confident will help throughout my life. Being a scholarship recipient has given me experiences and opportunities for which I will forever be incredibly grateful. I was encouraged to grow and deepen my knowledge. Being a boarder strengthened my independence, connections with others and my self-confidence. Throughout my three years, opportunities were endless, from sports to clubs. I was appointed as Head Boarder for 2025, which will forever be one of my most cherished and greatest achievements.'

'I look forward to working with people in rural areas. I hope to take many of the values I gained from Abbotsleigh into the field of agriculture and continue to be an empowered woman. I hope to be an inspiration to women and girls around me.'

Nell is currently studying a Bachelor of Agribusiness at the University of New England.



Satara Uthayakumaran (2011-2020)

Foundation Scholarship

'Abbotsleigh cultivated my sense of global citizenship, encouraging me to think critically and engage confidently in public dialogue. This supported my appointment as Australia's Youth Representative to the United Nations in 2025 on the world stage. The Foundation Scholarship enabled me to pursue a wide range of opportunities including debating, public speaking, choir, service learning and sport, which strengthened my leadership. Without these experiences, I would not be as prepared to engage with global and domestic challenges as I am today. These experiences shaped my ambition to pursue a career in policy and public leadership, contributing to meaningful change both in Australia and globally. This scholarship is fundamentally about access, and I hope others will similarly benefit from the opportunity to pursue their ambitions as active global citizens.'

Satara works as a Policy Adviser at the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet in the legal reform and domestic violence policy space.

From the President of the APA



When I think about Abbotsleigh, I don't just

think of classrooms or assemblies – I think of people. Parents chatting at drop-off, volunteers setting up trestle tables, girls waving from across the lawn and teachers sharing their passion for learning. Abbotsleigh is, at its heart, a community.

As I reach my twelfth year as an Abbotsleigh parent, I'm reminded of how much this community has given my family and how important it feels to give something back. This year, it has been an enormous privilege to serve as President of the Abbotsleigh Parents' Association (APA).

The APA exists to foster connection, support the School, strengthen the partnership between home and school, and enrich our daughters' experiences. We do this through events, initiatives and contributions that help build a community where every family feels they belong. Most importantly, we do it through people – parents who volunteer, welcome others, and quietly make a difference in countless small ways.

For me, volunteering has always been one of life's most meaningful privileges. Over the years, I've regularly served on medical missions in rural and remote communities across Australia, in the Borneo jungle and in remote villages of Cambodia and Fiji. Each experience has taught me the same lesson: that when you give your time to others, you gain something far greater in return.

Volunteering connects us to purpose and builds gratitude. Research consistently shows that it enhances mental health, happiness and wellbeing. The act of helping strengthens both the individual and the community around them.

That same spirit is alive at Abbotsleigh. Whether it's assisting at Cinema Under the Stars, cooking at the Junior School barbecue or organising a year-group dinner, every contribution matters. These small acts create an atmosphere of generosity, joy and a sense of belonging that our girls feel every day.

As parents, our actions teach our daughters powerful lessons about empathy, leadership and community. These lessons last long after they leave the school gates.

This year we've enjoyed many moments of connection: the laughter at Trivia Night, morning teas with new families and celebrating Abbotsleigh's 140th birthday. These events remind us that community doesn't happen by accident – it grows when people come together.

In 2025, the APA was proud to support key Abbotsleigh initiatives. We contributed \$20,000 as a matching donor to Giving Day, supporting the Abbotsleigh Foundation. Giving Day brings our community together in generosity and helps fund means-tested scholarships, including the Indigenous Scholarship, opening opportunities for girls who may not otherwise access an Abbotsleigh education.

As someone who received a means-tested scholarship for seven years to attend an Abbotsleigh-equivalent all-girls school in the UK, I know how transformative such support can be. It is more than financial assistance – it is belief in a young person's potential and the chance to access an education that can shape an entire future. That experience has stayed with me all my life and is why this initiative means so much to me and to our committee.

We also contributed \$3,000 to the Unusual Instrument Bursary, helping students explore instruments such as the bassoon and double bass, strengthening our ensembles and opening creative doors for girls who may not otherwise try them.

Next year, the APA will continue expanding opportunities for parents to get involved, making our association even more inclusive and accessible. There is a place for everyone, and every contribution matters.

Across 12 years at Abbotsleigh, I've served as a Parent Representative whenever I could. Those moments – planning morning teas, welcoming new families and working alongside others – have shaped my understanding of what this community truly is. If you'd like to be involved, I warmly invite you to reach out at apapresident@abbotsleigh.nsw.edu.au.

To every parent who has given their time, enthusiasm or quiet support – thank you.

Liz Rayment
President of the APA

From the Presidents of the ABPA

The Abbotsleigh boarder community enjoyed a successful year marked by strong family engagement, student enthusiasm and close collaboration between boarding staff and the Abbotsleigh Boarder Parents Association.

A highlight of the year was National Boarding Week, with our 2025 theme, 'Threads of Connection', aligning beautifully with Abbotsleigh's inspirational theme, 'Bee Connected'. In true Abbotsleigh spirit, the boarders embraced the week with enthusiasm, creativity and pride. The Senior School transformed into a sea of boarder blue. The celebrations included Day Girl vs Boarder sporting matches, a gratitude breakfast for teachers, boarding house tours and afternoon tea for day girls, plus a Senior School assembly run entirely by the boarders. The week also highlighted the diversity of our boarding community, with girls hailing from regional NSW, across Australia, and from international locations including Papua New Guinea, Malaysia, Vietnam, Hong Kong, China, Seoul, New Zealand, Dubai and Paris.

Boarders also participated in meaningful service initiatives, including The Dish meals program – a partnership with The Dish of St John's, Hornsby, which is a Christian organisation providing free meals and companionship to people experiencing disadvantage. The girls prepared and delivered over 60 homemade meals with handwritten notes, supported by ABPA volunteers and funding.

The boarding community also proudly raised more than \$3,000 for the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) through a month-long fitness challenge held in October. This initiative encouraged boarders to 'go further' by running, walking, cycling or swimming to symbolise the vast distances the RFDS travels each day to reach Australians in need. The RFDS remains a cause close to the hearts of Abbotsleigh boarders, many of whom come from rural and remote areas where access to emergency healthcare is limited.

The ABPA hosted a series of well-attended social and fundraising events throughout the year, including the Harbour Cruise, Autumn Fair stall and barbecue, and Christmas Jingle and Mingle Drinks. The association also supported improvements within the boarding houses, such as new couches for Upper Wheldon and a trampoline for Read House.

A new ABPA Committee has been elected for 2026 and is committed to continuing the association's valuable work in fostering connection, collaboration and community spirit at Abbotsleigh. Meeting once each term via Zoom, the committee encourages all boarding parents to participate, share ideas and contribute to the ongoing success of the boarding community. We also look forward to welcoming our new boarder families in 2026 and strengthening the supportive network that makes Abbotsleigh boarding so special.

Sally Ceeney and Sally Anderson
Presidents of the ABPA



Showcasing artistic talent

In a multitude of ways, the Grace Cossington Smith Gallery contributes to the cultural life of a dynamic school, writes its Director Mary Faith

In the second half of 2025, exhibitions such as Place of Anchors, Dreaming looking Inwards and To Approach the Unknowable provided visitors extraordinary opportunities for thoughtful reflection, engagement and immersion with artworks and the artists who created them.

Place of Anchors transformed the gallery with video works, taken with an iPhone, 360 camera and audio recorder. Artists Virginia Hilyard and Fiona Kemp undertook a month-long residency on Kotlin Island, Russia, and their documentation of the island captured their experiences with the subtle interplay of environment, time and presence.

Dreaming looking Inwards was a group show from Open Bite Printmakers Inc, a Sydney-based collective renowned for showcasing printwork of quality and diversity. Open Bite was celebrating 31 years of artistic collaboration and of fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of printmaking within the broader community.

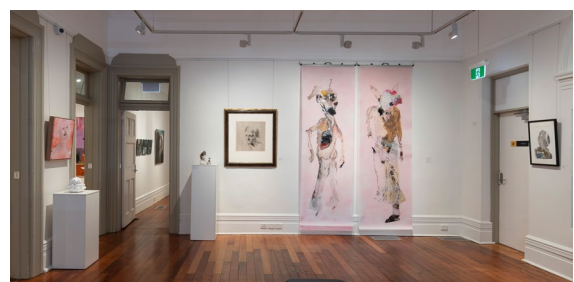
To Approach the Unknowable was an exhibition curated by the GCS Gallery with four Australian contemporary artists, Anthony Cahill, Louisa Chircop, Rhonda Dee and Ambrose Reisch. The artists, whose works are guided by a surrealist inclination, were invited to engage in a fascinating dialogue with personal ideas and works selected from the Geoffrey Hassall Collection. This exhibition created a rich exploration of the surrealist inspiration within the Australian context. However, in the School's 140th year it was the Abbotsleigh 'family' that took much of the focus in 2025.



Place of Anchors



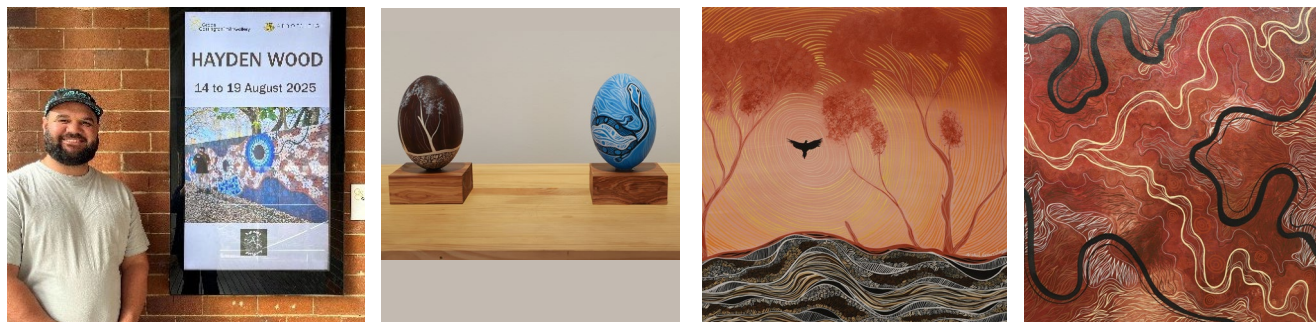
Dreaming looking Inwards



To Approach the Unknowable

Bokhara Dreaming

Hayden Wood, Gamilaraay artist (and Abbotsleigh parent of Amaya in Year 9), focuses on teaching the next generation to practise and preserve traditional practices through his Bokhara Dreaming. This beautiful heartfelt exhibition responded to his own life journey and his striving to learn and connect. After this show, Hayden received the Local Business Award at the Dubbo NAIDOC ball and held a sell-out exhibition.



CRASH, BANG

The Young Curators art program was designed by **3:33 Arts Projects** to partner with schools to support arts education and Australian artists. Young Curators provided a unique opportunity for Visual Art students from Abbotsleigh and Hornsby Girls' High School to meet and work with the artist and Old Girl Tina Havelock Stevens (1984).

The Young Curators students from 2025 wrote: 'Curating contemporary artist Tina Havelock Stevens' exhibition CRASH, BANG, as part of the 3:33 Art Projects Young Curators Program, has been an exciting and highly enriching learning experience. Initially, we looked at some of Tina Havelock Stevens' video works on her website before visiting her studio, where we were introduced to the full diversity of her practice, including her postcards, collages, videos and 3D works, as well as visiting Muru Gilligu, her site-specific public artwork in Martin Place Metro station. We had valuable conversations with Havelock Stevens about context and inspiration, the significance of site-specific performance and connection to place in her work, which helped us make informed decisions when curating her work in our exhibition CRASH, BANG.'

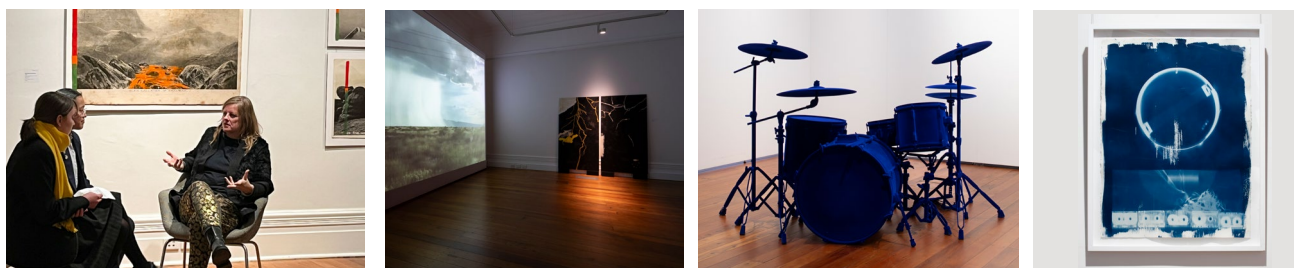
Possibility as Reality

Celebrating Abbotsleigh's 140th birthday, this exhibition, curated by Head Curator of the Macquarie University Art Gallery Rhonda Davis, presented 14 Abbotsleigh Old Girl artists whose works reflect the richness and evolution of contemporary art practice. Representing artists from each decade from the 1960s to the 2010s, Possibility as Reality revealed the personal and collective art journeys of the artists and their wide range of approaches and mediums. The exhibition offered a compelling intergenerational dialogue that celebrated the creative legacy of Abbotsleigh and its contribution to the broader cultural landscape. The exhibition catalogue introduction was written by Maggie Mackellar (1990) and the exhibition was opened by Cathy Wilcox (1980).

The title Possibility as Reality evolved from a 2013 interview between Old Girls Janet Laurence (1963) and Louise Schwartzkoff (2002). Schwartzkoff wrote: 'Even then [in the 1960s], art was an important part of Laurence's life but when she wanted to drop French classes to spend more time in the art room, the response from then headmistress Betty Archdale was incredulous: 'So you want to be a basket weaver?'

'Art was considered to be for the dummies,' remembers Laurence. 'It was considered low brow.'

Archdale – so progressive in other respects – could not conceive that a talented young woman might forge a career as an artist. Nor, for that matter, could Laurence. 'There were no other women artists I'd seen working around me,' she said. 'There just wasn't a presence of it... When I was asked, "What will you be?" – it wasn't even a possibility I imagined, that one could have a career in art.'



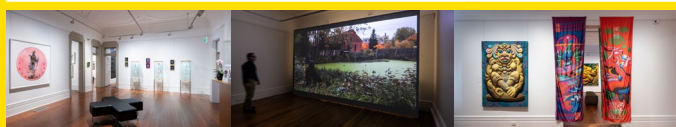
Even after Laurence finished school, once she shifted her attention from medical study to art, there were few female role models. 'You were going into the unknown,' she said. 'You were doing what you loved and you had a belief in it, but it's not like there were definite goals, because you didn't know what to reach for.'

Exhibiting Old Girl artists

Lucy Barker (1992), Lucy Buttenshaw (1979), Jaq Davies (1980), Rachel Fairfax (1990), Louise Fowler-Smith (1973), Emily Galicek (2012), Janet Laurence (1963), Fiona Mitchell (1975), Lisa Pang (1985), Eloise Rankine (2010), Helen Redmond (Bondfield, 1973), Julia Roberts (1983), Alex Snellgrove (1976), Sally Stokes (1970).

Grace Cossington Smith Gallery 2026 exhibition calendar

lines and lines and lines Drawing projects from Jon McCormack and Gary Warner	30 January to 28 February
ART NORTH HSC 2025 Visual Arts from schools in Hornsby and Ku-ring-gai	7 to 28 March
Beyond Utility Seven artists with diverse ideas and approaches to Still Life	9 April to 2 May
Activisms Robert Adamson and Juno Gemes Reflections on life, poetry, photography and the Hawkesbury River. Curated by Rhonda Davis	8 to 30 May
Young Curators Young Curators and 3:33 Art Projects with Utopia Art Sydney	4 to 13 June
Pulse Works from Joanna Cole, Yvonne Langshaw, Julia Kennedy-Bell and Jan Handel	24 June to 11 July
Abbotsleigh Grace Cossington Smith art award Finalists	18 July to 15 August
HSC 2026 Showcase Abbotsleigh Year 12 Visual Arts	25 to 29 August
Follow You Home Cambodian and Australian-Cambodian female artists explore belonging in transnational spaces	4 to 26 September
The Event of a Thread 20 emerging artists engaging with fabric	3 to 24 October
Richard Dunn After Namatjira Explorations on place and meaning in the gorge paintings of Albert Namatjira	31 October to 28 November
Local artists Christmas Sale	3 to 12 December



Call-outs for 2027

2027 EXHIBITION PROPOSALS

The Grace Cossington Smith Gallery seeks proposals for solo and group exhibitions for 2027. With a focus on contemporary art practices, submissions from emerging and established artists and curators are invited.

Proposals open: 28 April 2026
Proposals close: 30 August 2026

LOCAL ARTISTS FROM HORNSBY AND KU-RING-GAI

As part of the Grace Cossington Smith Gallery program local artists may be invited to participate in exhibitions in the gallery.

If you have not previously submitted your work and CV, please apply on the website application page in 2026.

Proposals: ongoing

The Grace Cossington Smith Gallery is a not-for-profit program run by Abbotsleigh, an Anglican pre K-12 Day and Boarding School for girls.

The Grace Cossington Smith Gallery acknowledges the unique status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the original owners and custodians of lands and waters, including the land and waters of our region.

Gallery hours Tues to Sat 10 am-5 pm FREE ENTRY | Gate 7, 1666 Pacific Highway, Wahroonga 02 9473 7878 | gcsgallery@abbotsleigh.nsw.edu.au
www.gcsgallery.com.au | An Anglican Pre K-12 Day and Boarding School for Girls

Our history brought to life

Digitising film reels from the 1960s to the 1980s gives us exciting new perspectives on Abbotsleigh's past, writes Archivist Dr Jennifer McLaren

Abbotsleigh's 140 years of history were brought to life during 2025 in events, displays, publications, music and more. The Thurles Thomas Archives celebrated a milestone too, by digitising film reels from the 1960s to the 1980s and hundreds of minutes of audio from cassette tapes. Not only did we 'save' the footage and audio which was fast deteriorating on at-risk media, but the contents are now accessible in digital format.

Film footage of teachers in academic gowns in the classroom, women wearing formal hats and gloves to the Chapel in 1965, and girls performing in an outdoor Shakespeare Festival show how much has changed at Abbotsleigh – and in Australia. But despite the 'old-fashioned' nature of the footage, we can see that Abbotsleigh has always looked to the future. The 1960s classrooms in the film included state-of-the-art science laboratories, and public speaking and performance have always been encouraged for our girls. The 90th Birthday Pageant and the 1985 Centenary Celebrations show that Abbotsleigh consistently inspires a sense of belonging and never misses an opportunity to celebrate its place in the world.

We discovered striking footage of Abbotsleigh's Centenary Garden Party, with then headmistress Miss Kathleen McCredie in her 1880s gown and parasol, strolling around the garden party at the Senior School (see below, left). Over 5,000 people came to the garden party, most in period dress. The weather was sunny on Saturday 13 April 1985 – a stark contrast with the 2025 Autumn Fair on Saturday 29 March!

The digitised cassette tapes reveal fascinating oral history interviews taken at a Centenary Morning Tea for Old Girls, and even some from a decade earlier. Interviews with Old Girls from the era of Marian Clarke and Margaret Murray include Enid Armstrong (Arundel, 1908), the Busby sisters (Lucy and Winsome) from the 1910s and Margaret Holmes (Read, 1926). Their stories shed more light on Abbotsleigh's history as we look beyond 140 years. To see footage made for our recent Gala Night, and for a link to *Humans of Abbotsleigh*, please [click here](#).

I would like to thank the Year 9 volunteers who contributed to the Archives this year as part of their Duke of Edinburgh service: Sophie, Cayla, Reece and Lorna. Their help has been invaluable.



The power of friendship

Her formative years at Abbotsleigh shaped Old Girl Shirley Fong's life, inspiring her to give back so generously to the community she loves, by Rhonda Kaan

When Shirley Fong (Lee, 1952) arrived at Abbotsleigh in 1948, she was the School's first Asian student, spoke no English and had just lost her mother. Sent alone from China, Shirley found herself in an unfamiliar country but thanks to the kindness and vision of headmistress Miss G Gordon Everett and her 'gels', Abbotsleigh became a place of belonging and transformation that would have a profound impact on the rest of her life.

According to Shirley, Miss Everett prepared the girls for her arrival with a simple but powerful message: 'Next term we are going to get a Chinese girl who doesn't speak any English, and I want you all to help her.'

Shirley says she was welcomed to Abbotsleigh by everyone, with frequent small acts of kindness shaping her experience and giving her the confidence to thrive. 'I just fell in love with the girls because they all wanted to help me,' she recalls. 'They accepted me and my differences – I felt like I was just part of them.'

Life at Abbotsleigh was full of firsts for Shirley, from learning what to do with a jug of gravy to discovering cheese and sausages. She carried a Chinese-English dictionary in her blazer pocket and when anyone wanted to speak with her, they would take it out and look up words to communicate.

'I just really fell in love with the School, the teachers and the girls; I experienced so much and I felt so happy there,' Shirley says. 'Miss Everett gave me so much encouragement; she said, "You can do anything you want to do!"'

After leaving Abbotsleigh, Shirley trained as a nurse at Royal North Shore Hospital, becoming the first Asian to do so. Her career spanned operating theatres, midwifery and maternal child health, culminating later with Shirley opening a local health centre in Melbourne, where she worked for 18 years, mostly with often anxious first-time mothers. Yet, through all her achievements, Shirley never forgot the woman who changed her life.

'Every decision I make, I think about Miss Everett – about which way I should go,' Shirley says.



Shirley on school holidays aged 15 years (circa 1948)

In 2000, Shirley endowed the Everett Scholarship to honour Miss Everett's extraordinary care and to give back to the School that welcomed her so warmly. 'I am very proud of that and very grateful that I can do it,' she says. 'Above all, I want Miss Everett's name to go down in the School's history.'

Since its inception, the Everett Scholarship has supported 48 students, recognising Year 9 girls for sound academic progress,

contribution to Senior School life and having a positive influence. Successfully managed by the Abbotsleigh Foundation, Shirley's initial gift has now grown, ensuring the scholarship will continue for many years to come.

Shirley hopes her story inspires others to give back: 'I want to show the School how much I appreciated it and how much I enjoyed my time there,' she says. 'Abbotsleigh gave me opportunities I would never otherwise have had.'

Her generosity is a testament to the lifelong impact of an Abbotsleigh education and to the power of one person's gratitude to shape the future for generations of girls.

'I am grateful to Abbotsleigh for being the kind of school that welcomes girls of diverse backgrounds and the gifts of difference they bring with them.'



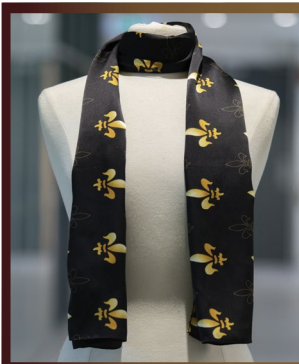
Shirley Lee (Fong, 1952)



Shirley at Abbotsleigh with Old Girl Melissa Slattery (Walsh, 1977) in 2002



Reunited again: at 92 years of age, Shirley moved into a local nursing home and discovered classmate Helen Gregson (White, 1952) is also a resident.



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From the President of the AOGU

What a magnificent end to Abbotsleigh's 140th birthday year! Old Girls and the AOGU were delighted to be a part of so many special moments this year, and to hold a unique celebration of our own. In July, the AOGU hosted the first ever Back to School Day, inviting Old Girls, former and current staff, and everyone's families, to gather on campus. More than 400 attendees recalled memories; were amazed by what has changed and what has not (the enduring scent of the Assembly Hall was all pervading); showed off their school to their families including future students (the youngest of whom was six months old); caught up with teachers and each other; attended Chapel and sang in the newly formed Old Girls choir; and enjoyed displays of student work and that of Old Girl artists at a specially curated Grace Cossington Smith Gallery exhibition.

There was such a joyous buzz on the day and the positive feedback means that it will be a feature of future AOGU calendars. Thanks to the almost 100 volunteers who made the day such a success, including staff, current students, Old Girls and the very hard-working AOGU Committee.

You may also have noticed something new this year with the official launch of a refreshed AOGU logo and branding. Our first logo was hastily compiled in the mid-2010s, focusing on the School crest. The new identity has been carefully designed to remain intrinsically connected to Abbotsleigh while giving the AOGU its own fresh, vibrant presence. Drawing on a historic Abbotsleigh fleur-de-lys from a 1980s school badge, paired with a *Vogue*-inspired typeface and a flexible design system, the branding honours our past while allowing us to move forward with confidence.

Another important highlight of 2025 was the milestone decision to award the Kathleen McCredie Award annually. This scholarship is a powerful example of how small acts of generosity, sustained over time, can have a lasting impact. Established by the AOGU in 2001 with seed funding of \$100,000 and supported ever since by donations from Old Girls, the AOGU and the broader school community, the award has enabled girls, who otherwise may not have had the opportunity, to attend Abbotsleigh in Years 10-12. The AOGU is particularly grateful for the School's generous commitment to cover between 25% and 50% of boarding fees when the recipient is a boarder. That the scholarship has grown from being offered once every three years to now supporting a student each year is a true testament to the collective generosity behind it.



From left: Honorary Treasurer, Alex Zhao (2015), outgoing Honorary President Sarah Franks (1991), incoming Honorary President Bronwyn Cooper (Ross-Jones, 1980), outgoing Honorary Secretary Fiona Hobill Cole (Armstrong, 1981) and Honorary Vice President Belinda Chiarella (Frame, 2001)

As Abbotsleigh's milestone year comes to a close, so too does my four-year term as Honorary President. When I commenced in 2022, we were still navigating the constraints of Covid. Through a membership survey, we developed the AOGU's Connection through Community vision – a guiding principle that asks how each activity strengthens connections between Old Girls and with the School. Some initiatives have been highly visible, such as Back to School Day and a stronger social media presence. Others, including more transparent nomination processes, a streamlined membership experience, increased delegation to sub-committees, improved reporting and strengthened financial management, have taken place behind the scenes.

It has been incredibly rewarding to see this work reflected in record attendance at AOGU events and strong Old Girl participation in School celebrations throughout the year. The addition of nine new AOGU Committee members at the end of 2025 is another encouraging sign of growing engagement.

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to serve as AOGU President and to work alongside such a talented, committed and good-humoured group of women on the committee, as well as with the School and Development Department. I also sincerely thank the executive teams over the past four years, Headmistress Megan Krimmer, Council Chair Linda Ellis, Old Girls Relations Manager Heidi Grout and all those who have supported the AOGU's work. Looking ahead, I am delighted to welcome Bron Cooper as the new President and wish her and the incoming executive every success.

Sarah Franks (1991)
Honorary President

AOGU

Abbotsleigh Old
Girls' Union

Connection
through
Community

AOGU Back to School Day

On Sunday 27 July 2025, Abbotsleigh 'buzzed' with energy as more than 400 Old Girls, former staff and families celebrated the inaugural AOGU Back to School Day as part of Abbotsleigh's 140th birthday celebrations. We hoped the events throughout the day would foster a sense of reconnection, rediscovery and a chance to reminisce. The glowing feedback received from those who attended showed overwhelmingly that our hopes were realised.

Junior and Senior School Tours



“

I particularly enjoyed mingling with some of my former students and some of their parents. I really feel privileged to be part of the Abbotsleigh community.

Janine Cooper
(former member of staff)

“

Thanks to the two incredible Year 9 students who took our tour group around. They were bright, confident and so kind as I navigated the campus with my six-month-old and a pram!

Alex Cowley (2011)



Opening of the Possibility as Reality exhibition at the Grace Cossington Smith Gallery



“

Great to connect with Old Girls from across generations with a shared experience!

Old Girl (1999)



“

I had the priceless opportunity to connect with countless Old Girls and learn about their experiences!

Kylie Liu
(Year 11, photographer)

The Chapel Service



“

The weather couldn't have been more perfect – it brought the stained glass windows to life in such a breathtaking way. It was truly heartwarming to see familiar faces like Miss McCredie, Mrs Claydon, Mr Tasker and Rev MacDonald.

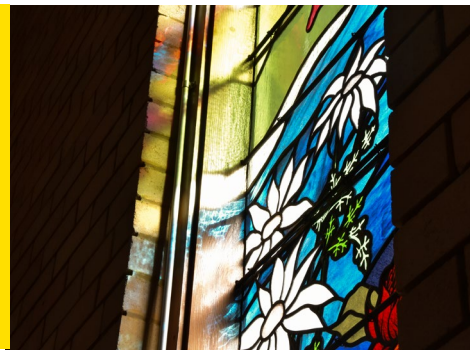
Venita Rajput (1992)



“

I don't think I have hugged so many Old Girls in one day before.

**Robyn Claydon
(former deputy headmistress and teacher)**



Lunch atop the new Betty Archdale Library



“

Wonderful catching up with those I haven't seen in decades and seeing how the School has evolved to ensure that the future women of the world are well equipped

Old Girl (2005)



“

What thrilled me most about that day, oddly, was not the new buildings but how many former teachers, plus Miss McCredie (!), were there. For me, these women were the most formative and impressive thing about the School. (Although it was deeply reassuring to find the old Assembly Hall had the same distinctive aroma.)

Belinda Luscombe (1981)



AOGU AGM

The 2025 AOGU AGM was held on Tuesday 18 November and attended by more than 30 Old Girls in person and via Zoom. It was a chance to reflect on the successful year of AOGU events that contributed to the School's 140th birthday celebrations, particularly the Back to School Day in July. It was impressive to hear how much this relatively small group achieves with support of our Patron, Headmistress Mrs Megan Krimmer; the Old Girls Relations Manager Heidi Grout; and Old Girl volunteers.

We thanked outgoing Committee Members for their contributions, particularly Sarah Franks (1991) and Fiona Hobill Cole (Armstrong, 1981) for their terms respectively as President and Secretary, as well as Sonia Baillie (Laudums, 1995) for serving as AOGU Representative on the Abbotsleigh Foundation. Encouragingly, nine new members were welcomed to the Committee.

Louise Stevens (1985) was announced as the recipient of the 2025 Anniversary Grant to support a new project, Together in the First Year. It will adapt an existing program that provides in person 1:1 support for new mothers across Sydney into an expanded online offering to help mothers across the state and beyond.

We will hear more about Louise's project at an AOGU Speakers Morning Tea.

Another highlight was welcoming Judith Poole, Abbotsleigh's 10th headmistress from 2005-2016, as an Honorary Life Member of the AOGU in recognition of her service to the union and the School. She was a visionary and creative leader who inspired a generation of Abbotsleigh girls and staff. Judith was very involved in encouraging local and regional reunions and expanding gatherings across the globe, attended all Old Girl events and activities and assisted to grow the visibility of Old Girls and the works of the AOGU across all aspects of the School and broader community. She has a granddaughter starting at Abbotsleigh in 2026 and is looking forward to attending school events again.

Sally Ruston, head of the Junior School from 2000 to 2024, was officially welcomed as an Honorary Life Member of the AOGU in recognition of her service to the union and the Junior School. She led and transformed the Junior School for 25 years. Each of the 2,500 girls who sat in the seats of the Junior School during Sally's tenure has been imprinted with a sense of striving and possibility.

At the conclusion of the meeting, attendees caught up over drinks and nibbles.



Outgoing AOGU President Sarah Franks (1991) and new President Bronwyn Cooper (Ross-Jones, 1980)



Judith Poole, Abbotsleigh's 10th headmistress, is welcomed as an Honorary Life Member of the AOGU by President Bronwyn Cooper (Ross-Jones, 1980)



Headmistress and Patron of the AOGU Mrs Megan Krimmer, new Honorary Life Members of the AOGU, Judith Poole and Sally Ruston (former headmistresses of the Senior and Junior Schools) and the AOGU Committee and Members at the 2025 AGM

AOGU | Merchandise



All profits donated to the Kathleen McCredie Award Fund

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Dangerously Modern

Australian Women Artists in Europe 1890-1940

The Dangerously Modern exhibition at the Art Gallery of NSW explores the lives and art of 50 trailblazing women artists and uniquely speaks to Abbotsleigh Old Girls. Their artworks are a testament to their immense talent and perseverance against social constraints to pursue careers overseas, contributing to the development of modern art movements in Europe that include realism, impressionism, post-impressionism, cubism and abstraction.

As noted by the AGNSW at the exhibition: 'They brought new ideas back to Australia and played an integral, often unrecognised role in modernising our nation.'

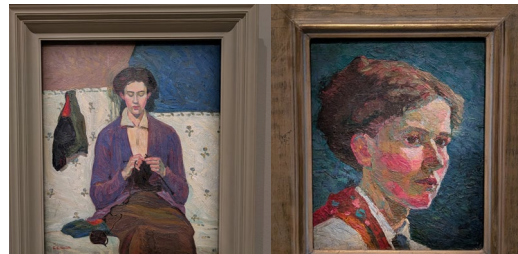
The featured artists included Old Girl Grace Cossington Smith (c1908-c1910). A highlight was viewing her self-portrait at age 24 and her famous painting of her sister, *The Sock Knitter*, with its groundbreaking and

distinctive post-impressionist style, thickly applied paint and exaggerated bold use of colour.

To allow a broader range of Old Girls to attend, such as younger ones or those working full-time, we held two evening tours across the exhibition duration. The tour on Wednesday 19 November 2025 was hosted by new AOGU President Bronwyn Cooper (Ross-Jones, 1980) and attended by 30 Old Girls, some of whom gathered afterwards at the Art After Hours Pop-up Bar for drinks. The second tour was held on Wednesday 14 January 2026 and was hosted by Belinda Burton (Tjeuw, 1991). It was very special to have Annie Woodham (1961) as our extremely knowledgeable and enthusiastic tour guide. With both tours being sell-outs, we look forward to organising more evening AGNSW tours in the future.



Old Girl mothers and daughters recognising a young Grace Cossington Smith: From left, Olivia (2015), Clementine (2019) and Fiona Hobill Cole (Armstrong, 1980); Bronwyn (Ross-Jones, 1980) and Georgia Cooper (2019); Sarah Franks (1991) and Audrey Kennedy (2024)



Grace Cossington Smith's *The Sock Knitter*, 1915 (left) and her self-portrait *Study of a Head*, 1916

Golf Day

Friday 5 December 2025 saw 47 keen AOG golfers, current mothers and friends tee off at Long Reef Golf Club for the 90th AOGU Golf Day. Despite reaching 37.8C (thankfully there was some relief from the sea breeze), most players returned after their round to the Clubhouse still smiling, albeit with very red faces! A huge thank you to Libby Myles (Gilder, 1981) for organising this event so well once again. After a relaxed lunch, prizes were awarded:

AOGU Salver for the best Scratch score Kerry Skellern (Howell, 1982). Thank you to Tina Armati (Travers, 1964) for presenting the salver, which had been donated by her mother Margaret Travers (Marr, 1938) and friend Pamela Marr (Graham, 1938) in 1966.

AOGU President's Cup for the best Stableford score Katrina Glendinning (Warburton, 1985)

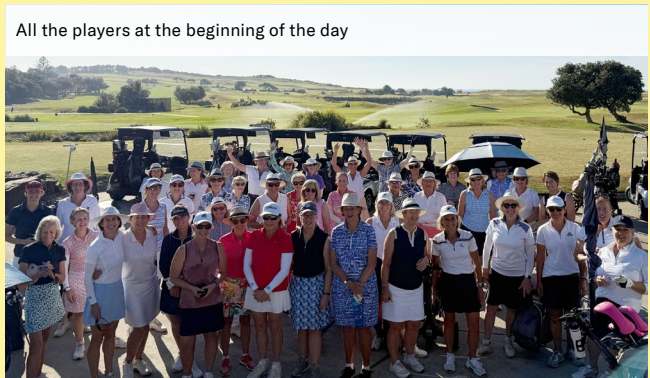
Abbotsleigh Mother/Teacher Best Stableford score Lesley Pickup (former teacher)

Team winners Stableford score Valentine Armstrong (1985), Karen Elgie (past parent), Narelle Fay (Armstrong, 1983) and Katrina Glendinning (Warburton, 1985)

Longest Drive Div 1 Stephanie Sherlock (current parent); **Div 2** Katrina Moore (Loveridge, 1986)

Nearest the Pin Sue Meares (1976)

Eagle on the 9th hole Mandy McLean (Deane, 1978)



All the players at the beginning of the day



Kate Druce (past parent), Steph Sherlock (current parent), Kathryn Breden (1987) and Sarah Hornery (1986)

Food, glorious food... and wine, too!

A friendship forged at Abbotsleigh, together with a shared love for food, wine and travel, has shaped the careers of these two Old Girls, writes Rhonda Kaan

A treasured friendship based on a shared passion for food, wine and travel has taken two Abbotsleigh Old Girls around the world and ultimately landed both interstate with highly successful careers in the food and hospitality industry.

From dining as boarders in the Abbotsleigh Dining Room to exploring new bars and restaurants while living and working in Melbourne to travelling as tourists across Europe and now being based in South Australia together, Sarah Goldfinch (Henderson, 1992) says her friendship with Fiona Carboni (Sutherland, 1993) is special in many ways. 'With every career crisis or potential promotional move, Fi has been my sounding board,' Sarah says. 'When I've been close to burnout, she has intervened with wise words that put family, friendship and work back into the correct perspective (in that order!).'

Following an already illustrious career in the global tourism and hospitality industry, including in leading luxury and lifestyle hotels, Sarah operated her own hospitality consultancy and for the past two years has been the General Manager at the Adelaide Convention Centre.

'I am eternally grateful for the friendships I made at Abbotsleigh... friends who are all high achievers in their own right,' Sarah says. 'These friendships supported me with every transfer to a new country or city and introduced me to a network of people and their business associates who supported my career and helped along the way.'

Describing her as a 'dear friend', Fiona says Sarah was the reason she and Italian husband Matteo moved to the Barossa Valley in 2012, where Sarah, at the time, was the general manager of the Novotel Resort.

'Being a boarder at Abbotsleigh during my senior high school years really had such an impact on who I became as an adult,' Fiona says. 'Building on family values, the people I met and connections made during this time have inspired me and continue to do so.'

The Carbonis own and run Casa Carboni, the renowned Italian cooking school and *enoteca* (an Italian term for a specialised wine shop or bar, literally meaning 'wine repository' or 'wine library') in the charming South Australian historic town of Angaston.



Firm friends: Sarah Goldfinch (Henderson, 1992) and Fiona Carboni (Sutherland, 1993)

'We have been fortunate to be invited several times to be featured in various magazines including *Delicious*, *Gourmet Traveller*, *Halliday* and *Australian Country*,' Fiona said. 'Qantas magazine features have also been wonderful and I have loved it when old school friends have sent me messages when they have been in flight and read an article about our business or in a magazine they subscribe to.'

Casa Carboni has also been featured on *Poh & Co*, *Everyday Gourmet* twice, on *Getaway* as well as South Australian travel shows.

It is a career Fiona says was inspired by her art teacher Miss Viola Dominello (who continues to teach and inspire students at Abbotsleigh) during a Year 11 Art and History Tour of Paris and Italy, which her mother Old Girl Sue Sutherland (Pryde, 1964) also accompanied her on.

'The art, the history and culture we experienced, as well as [Miss Dominello's] kindness, passion and creativity, I'll never forget,' Fiona says. 'I learnt the art of being moved by food and culture during this trip, and how it connects people from all over the world.'

Reflecting on her education and how it now relates to her career, Sarah said the key takeaway Abbotsleigh taught her was there is no 'glass ceiling', no boundaries for women to achieve whatever they wanted to do.

'Because of the confidence Abbotsleigh instilled in us, I applied for jobs and promotions I didn't always have

OLD GIRL NEWS

the experience or qualifications to do, but I believed in myself and I had the confidence to try and give it a go,' Sarah says. 'If there was a glass ceiling, I was blissfully unaware!'

In the lead up to the opening of the new Abbotsleigh Dining Precinct this year, as an Old Girl boarder Fiona says she remembers the old Dining Room fondly. 'I do recall it, but I also remember (and can still smell) the charcoal chicken and salad shop in Wahroonga, which we frequented quite a lot!' she laughs.



Casa Carboni

Having discovered her passion for food and travel on her first overseas trip during a Year 11 Art and History Tour and graduating from the University of Canberra with a Bachelor of Arts in Tourism, Fiona Carboni (Sutherland, 1993) worked for the Charles Sturt University Winery in Wagga Wagga before returning to France to spend a year in Bordeaux. Her love of wine then saw her take on an export manager's role in Melbourne and she travelled around the globe to establish new markets for a portfolio of Australian boutique wine producers.

Upon her return to Australia from a multi-continent work trip in 2005, Fiona met Matteo while he was working for Warrenmang Winery in regional Victoria. Born and raised in Forli in Northern Italy, Matteo's Nonna Pia had introduced him to making fresh pasta as a young boy before he went on to study Food Science and Technology at the University of Bologna. He then travelled and worked throughout Italy, France and Germany, discovering artisan producers along the way.

The pair relocated to Europe together in 2006, where Matteo joined the famous Academia Barilla – a culinary institute dedicated to the art of Italian gastronomy.



During his time there, he worked alongside some of the world's greatest chefs and food producers. Meanwhile, Fiona took on an export manager's role with Italian food company Greci Industria Alimentare.

In 2012, having returned to Australia from northern Italy, Fiona and Matteo decided to call the Barossa home. Fiona says they felt welcomed within the community from the moment they arrived.

The Carbonis' desire to prepare delicious yet simple dishes using beautiful Barossa produce, and enjoy fine wine with like-minded people, is the cornerstone of everything they do at Casa Carboni. Their *enoteca* is a gastronomic hub for the enjoyment of Italian food, made with the best local produce and featuring favourite wines from their European travels.

The Casa Carboni Italian Cooking School was born from a love of food, wine and desire to pass on the skills and techniques of Italian cooking; it's also about using the finest produce that the Barossa and the South Australian coast have to offer.

'Our aim is simple: to provide a fun and relaxed learning environment, leaving you with the knowledge and techniques to replicate our delicious Italian dishes in your own home,' Fiona says. 'I've especially loved seeing old school friends visit over the years and experience what we have created since opening our doors.'

Casa Carboni Italian Cooking School and Enoteca is located at 67 Murray Street, Angaston, South Australia. For more information, please visit

www.casacarboni.com.au



Family portrait: Matteo, Fiona, Sofia and Filippo.
Photo: Mark Roper for *Country Style Magazine*

TV's most wanted serial killer

Behind the scenes, Old Girl Judith Colquhoun (Firth, 1960) has had a huge impact on Australian television, writes Carrie Kablean

Back in 1985, an Abbotsleigh Old Girl reduced hundreds of Australian television viewers to tears. And she did it on purpose! Well, maybe it wasn't *entirely* the fault of screenwriter Judith Colquhoun (Firth, 1960) but she was the one who wrote the death scene for Molly Jones, the much-loved character from *A Country Practice's* (ACP) Wandin Valley, whose slow demise had so many people sobbing into their hankies. The Molly Jones death scene, watched by more than 2.2 million viewers, would become the highest-rated episode in ACP's 13-year run and it remains indelibly printed on many minds – so much so that it became the inspiration for a play called *How to Plot a Kill in Two Days*, which premiered at the Ensemble Theatre in Sydney last October. There's another Abbotsleigh connection, too: in that play, Old Girl Georgie Parker (1982), herself an ACP veteran, took the role of the character based on Judith.

Judith was in the audience on that opening night and remains slightly bemused at such intense interest four decades on 'although,' she says, 'it was huge fun. And Melly [playwright Melanie Tait] dedicating it to me, I was really touched – and amazed at all the fuss. And I was interviewed by the *Fin Review*, I thought it was hilarious.

'I happened to get the gig all those years ago because I did nice deaths. I was lousy at comedy, but I did lovely deaths! I killed everybody!' laughs Judith. In fact, she despatched so many characters she became known, in one publication, as 'TV's Most Wanted Serial Killer'.

Who else did she kill? 'Oh, so many,' says Judith. 'I'd already killed Molly's baby and I'd killed Terence's daughter, so it was sort of inevitable I'd get Molly's death but I reached a point where I refused to do any more. I was already known as the Queen of Death!'

Seeing off Molly was necessary because actor Anne Tenney, who played Molly, wanted to leave the show. The writing team had to come up with storylines to erase her and it had to be sensitively done because ACP was family viewing. 'We had a huge young audience and it had to be plotted very carefully,' says Judith. 'We couldn't kill her in a car crash or anything like that. It would have been different if she'd been a nasty character, we could have done something terrible to her!'

Instead, the writers, overseen by the late producer Jim Davern, used a long leukaemia arc to lessen the trauma of Molly's passing. 'And we tried to put a positive spin on



Judith Colquhoun and Georgie Parker on opening night at the Ensemble Theatre, October 2025

life for Brendan and Chloe [Molly's husband and child] in the following episodes, not to wallow in grief but to celebrate Molly's joyful, loving life and her contribution to the town.'

Judith, who has worked with Tait before and counts her as a friend, loved *How to Plot a Kill*, although she says 'the actual plotting of Molly's death took place over several weeks not two days'. So was the play more fiction than fact? 'It was fictional, up to a point,' says Judith, 'but some lines were not fictional at all – but that will have to remain a secret! Georgie [Parker's] character was certainly based on me.'

Had she and Georgie met each other before the play? 'No, but I'd written for her before.' Judith wrote more than 100 episodes of ACP and has writing credits as long as your arm for such shows as *Bellbird*, *Home and Away*, *Flying Doctors* and *Blue Heelers*.

Parker, who played nurse Lucy Gardiner in ACP from 1989 to 1992, remembers watching Molly's death back in 1985.

OLD GIRL NEWS

'It was so beautifully played, beautifully directed, and it was such a gentle way of letting go of a character and saying goodbye to them.'

'Everyone cried when we were plotting it,' laughs Judy. 'Everyone had hay fever that day! Terrible hay fever!'

Of *Abbotsleigh*, Judith has very fond memories. She recalls how she had to wait to be accepted because there were no places. 'I went to North Sydney for a year and my sister Robin Gregor (Firth, 1951), who was already at *Abbotsleigh*, went up to see Ruth Hirst, who was the headmistress, to plead my case – and probably exaggerated my brilliance and all the rest of it. Anyway, I got in in second year, and I thought I'd died and gone to heaven. My best friend Kay (Turnock, 1960), who I had known since we were four, was already at *Abbotsleigh* – and it was my dream to go there.

I just adored it, loved it. And I did well. Kay and I are still best friends, and Millie [Elizabeth Tomlinson (Mills, 1960)] is still a very good friend.'

After *Abbotsleigh*, Judy went to NIDA. 'I was one of six who did the first ever Production Course.' Having graduated, she 'worked on things in various films and radio and TV at the ABC. My husband worked at the ABC as well and one Sunday morning, we were in Jim Davern's kitchen and they were discussing *Bellbird*, which had just moved from Sydney to Melbourne. And they were wondering where they were going to find writers and suddenly they looked at me and said, "What about you?"

'I said, "I've never written a script in my life." But they said, "You write." So I said, "OK, I'll give it a go" – and the rest, as they say, is history.'



Judith and friends: Elizabeth Tomlinson (Mills, 1960), Georgie Parker (1982) and Kay Schemmer (Turnock, 1960)



Georgie Parker channelling Judith Colquhoun in *How to Plot a Kill in Two Days* (Photo: Brett Boardman)



Genevieve Lemon, Georgie Parker and Sean O'Shea in *How to Plot a Kill in Two Days* (Photo: Brett Boardman)

True grit

Old Girl Jennah Poon (2024), who underwent spinal surgery in 2020, recently competed in her First Ironman triathlon. This article, kindly reprinted with permission from Ironman media, tells the story



At just 19 years old, Sydney student Jennah Poon is about to tick off a major milestone toward a goal that seemed unimaginable just a few years ago. Next Sunday*, she'll tackle the Qatar Airways IRONMAN 70.3 Melbourne, comprised of a 1.9km swim, 90km bike ride and 21.1km run – a stepping stone, towards one day completing a full distance IRONMAN triathlon.

Jennah's love for triathlon began early. She grew up in a swim squad, knew how to ride a bike, and regularly went on runs with her mum. From the age of nine, she eagerly took part in triathlon events, experiences that sparked a passion for sport and adventure. She would go on to complete multiple triathlons across several years until January 2020 when everything came crashing to a halt. Jennah underwent major spinal surgery to correct scoliosis, a procedure that left her with two rods and five screws in her back.

'In the short term, recovery was hard and painful, especially the two weeks in hospital having to regain strength and struggling to walk without fainting, finding it hard especially up and down stairs,' said Jennah.

'I remember wanting to stay in my hospital room when the physio would come because it was so painful to try and walk and my legs felt like they were going to break.'

The timing couldn't have been worse. Just as she was beginning to recover, the Covid pandemic hit, forcing

her into isolation. Bed-bound and lacking motivation, Jennah's fitness and wellbeing plummeted.

'I grew into a couch potato and, over the next few years, I'd find myself having problems in my relationship with exercise and food. No physical activity for a year had a massive impact on my life. There was no way I would be doing any sports let alone a triathlon,' said Jennah.

'I lost a lot of motivation and lacked a sense of purpose. Surgery took a big toll on my mental health as I felt hopeless and somewhat like a burden to others.'

Despite the challenges, Jennah slowly rebuilt her strength and confidence. She became determined to get back into triathlons – thinking it would give her a sense of determination and motivation once again. Scrolling through social media one day, she came across IRONMAN – a 226km triathlon and an idea that lit a fire within her.

'I remember searching it up on the internet and thinking people who did IRONMANs were absolutely amazing and crazy,' said Jennah, 'so at the beginning of 2021 – one year post surgery – I put doing an IRONMAN on my bucket list for the future.'

Jennah gradually returned to sport, competing in shorter triathlons and participating in the swimming leg of the NSW All Schools Relay Triathlon in Year 10.

'I slowly grew back the love I had for the sport,' she said.

'At the beginning of this year, for some reason a lot of influencers I followed had begun to train for triathlons or had done IRONMANs – and so it got me thinking deeply again. I like to think that I have a great sense of determination and drive, and I like to have something I'm working towards.'

Having turned 18 at the end of 2024, Jennah realised she was eligible to race an IRONMAN 70.3 – half the distance of an IRONMAN triathlon. Encouraged by her family and inspired by athletes she followed online, she began to dream again.

'I looked up races in Australia and found that IRONMAN 70.3 Melbourne gave me enough time to train and looked like a fantastic course,' she said. 'It was something I wanted to do and something that I had on my bucket list for four years. There was no better time than the present and so I signed up.'

Now studying Exercise Physiology at university with aspirations to pursue a Master's in Physiotherapy, Jennah has spent the past six months balancing her studies, part-time work, and a rigorous training schedule. Her determination has been unwavering, even when motivation waned.

'There were times where my motivation was so low I just had to rely on my determination to get through the session,' she said. 'The thing that kept me going was imagining myself crossing that finish line.'

Jennah credits her spinal surgery not only with reshaping her physical journey, but also with inspiring her academic and personal path. 'Spinal surgery really grew my love for the body, movement and health, and inspired my studies,' she said. 'I'm reminded that our bodies are incredible and can do things we couldn't imagine.'

A personal mantra has also helped her stay focused through the toughest moments. 'Something I constantly tell myself is to "be bothered",' she said. 'I sometimes tend to be lazy and not want to do things because it's too hard or I'm too comfortable, but the concept of "being bothered" reminds me that opportunities come and go and they aren't going to wait for us. The door is there for us to open but we need to open that door and take that leap before it goes away. I try to make the most of life and the opportunities that come my way.'

Jennah is filled with anticipation and gratitude. She also hopes her story will inspire others – especially young people facing setbacks or struggling with self-doubt – to believe in their potential. 'Setbacks are temporary – there is always light at the end of the tunnel,' she said. 'No goal is too big when your heart is in the right place. If you think and believe that you can attain your goal, you will.'

'IRONMAN 70.3 took place in Melbourne on 9 November 2025.'

Honoured to know you, Rebecca!

As part of the 2025 King's Birthday Honours, Old Girl Rebecca McGrath (1982) was named Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for 'significant service to business through leadership roles in compliance, audit and finance'. Rebecca is a non-executive director at Macquarie Group and Bank, and a former chief financial officer at oil and gas giant BP.



Rebecca McGrath (1982) receiving her award from Governor of Victoria Professor the Honourable Margaret Gardner AC at Government House in September

1960 Leavers 65 Year Reunion

On Friday 28 November, a group of 21 1960 leavers came together at the School for their 65-year reunion, organised by Janet Williamson with the Old Girls Office. A smaller number started the day with a tour around the School to see the many marvellous changes and additions but also the reassuringly familiar parts. The tour was followed by warm welcome by Headmistress Megan Krimmer before everyone sat down for a lovely lunch, which provided a wonderful opportunity for everyone to catch up and take a walk down memory lane. The room was filled with joyous chatter and laughter until it became time for everyone to say goodbye. The consensus was that everyone should meet again sooner rather than later!

Janet Williamson (Simpson)



1965 Leavers 60 Year Reunion

The 1965 leavers held their 60-year reunion on Saturday 8 November at the Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron in Kirribilli. The 48 Abbotsleigh Old Girls who attended were welcomed to the event by the reunion committee of Helen Lowry (Ireland), Penny Sharp (Petrie), Belinda Dawkins (Petrie), Judith Williams (Johnstone), Marg Sachs (Coburn), Jane Hewitt (Elmslie), Kerrie Herde (MacDonald) and Annabel Baxter (Marr). We were joined by AOGU President, Sarah Franks (1991).

Annabel gave a short speech reminding us of the exploits of our wonderful headmistress Betty Archdale and the way she encouraged us to speak our minds. Sarah Franks followed – she agreed; she had experienced this trait many times!

Annabel Baxter (Marr)



1975 Leavers 50 Year Reunion

How could it really be 50 years since we had left school? Such a significant milestone and it had really crept up on us all! Ever since leaving Abbotsleigh in 1975, our dear friend Celia (Vild née Harrowell) had taken responsibility for getting us all together, organising every reunion up until our 40th, but sadly passing away shortly thereafter.

For our 50th reunion, we were determined not to let her down and so a fun group of 12 friends decided to make a real festival of this significant occasion. Over one four-day weekend in October we set up an itinerary of activities that allowed people to dip in and out of events according to their interest and availability.

On Friday 17 October, around 30 'old' classmates attended a tour of Abbotsleigh with morning tea to follow. We spent a happy morning reacquainting ourselves with the School and each other and being shown the impressive new areas of the premises. Many old haunts had changed a bit but there certainly was a lot of laughter and reminiscing over some of our old antics and the fun we all had long ago.

On the Saturday it was time for our big celebration lunch at The Fernery in Mosman. Almost 90 girls attended; the setting was great and laughter and excited conversations filled the room. We had some fun with 1975-related trivia and there was plenty of mingling and reconnecting for everyone to enjoy. Indeed, no one really wanted to leave and there were calls for more low-key, regular pub meet-ups in future.

For the 30+ girls who could make the Sunday 19 and Monday 20 Southern Highlands 'Extension' there was plenty more fun to be had, beginning with a morning tea at the beautiful home of Sally Tompson ('Milly' Ryan) in Mittagong. Sunday was then spent roaming around the galleries and gardens of the area, bumping into friends and joining groups at various cafes along the way.



Late in the day, we all met up at a beautiful private home and were generously shown around the magnificent gardens by the owner, who shared the history of the property with us all. The weather couldn't have been kinder and we enjoyed drinks as we happily wandered around the grounds before heading off to the Bundanoon home of our very talented classmate, designer and friend, Tigger Hall. Tigger walked us through the studio where all her designs are created and on display and we then went upstairs to a gorgeous catered dinner, where there was obviously still a lot more to discuss!

Our last day got off to a more leisurely start, with people meeting up for a country breakfast, playing golf at Bowral Golf Club, walking around the shops or going for a bush walk, before returning home, exhausted but with many memories of a really happy, successful and fun weekend.

Special thanks must go to our Southern Highlands locals, Milly and Tigg for setting up such a wonderful program for the Sunday and Monday. For those who had the time, this was a really special way to finish off our Reunion Festival. There certainly didn't seem to be much break in the conversation over the entire four days and plans for future catch ups are certainly on the agenda for many!

Chris Moss (McNeill)



1980 Leavers 45 Year Reunion

On Saturday 26 July, more than 40 of the 1980 leavers had a marvellous time catching up at the Cammeray Golf Club, 10 years on from our last reunion. People made such an effort to attend, travelling from overseas, interstate and from regional areas to come to Sydney to get together. We chatted about so many things in our lives and the world. It was so wonderful to spend a few hours together after such a long hiatus to connect with so many with the common bond of our school years. We missed those who couldn't make it for various reasons, including grand-babies!

Hoping we can all do this again in 2030 for the 50th.

Kathryn Kearley and Bronwyn Ross-Jones (Cooper)



1985 Leavers 40 Year Reunion

The 1985 leavers thoroughly enjoyed a wonderful night of reconnecting and reminiscing at their 40-year reunion, held at the Occidental Hotel at Wynyard. The venue, music and decorations felt like stepping back into the 1980s, setting the perfect backdrop to an evening filled with much laughter, many conversations and shared memories, and genuine connections being rekindled.

With 52 attendees, some travelling many hours to be there, it was a heartfelt celebration of enduring friendships and the joy of being together again after four decades, with a number of people kicking on into the night or meeting up again at the Back to School Day the following morning.

A big thanks to the organisers (Susannah, Suz and Kim) and everyone for taking the time to be part of another great gathering.

Suzanne Barker



1990 Leavers 35 Year Reunion

On Thursday 27 November, as a balmy summer's evening drew to a close, a third of the 1990 leavers were assembled at the Tilbury Hotel in Sydney for a celebration of the past 35 years. Many stories were shared of careers, families, travel, study and businesses, and promises were made to hold regular get-togethers to include those unable to attend this event. We are an incredibly diverse, educated and accomplished group of women with a shared history but rich and varied life experiences. We are already looking forward to the next catch up.

Fiona Pullen (Parker)





1995 Leavers 30 Year Reunion

We missed our 25-year reunion, thanks to Covid, so finally catching up for our 30-year one at Kitty Hawke felt well overdue. It was a special night, filled with familiar faces, loud laughter and those ‘Do you remember when?’ stories that picked up right where we had left off. Old friendships slipped easily back into place while new connections were made over shared memories and life updates. Many people travelled great distances to be there, which made the night feel even more meaningful and showed how much our year group still values those bonds.

By the end of the night, there was a real sense of gratitude for the friendships that have lasted, the ones rekindled and the effort everyone made to come together and celebrate our time at Abbotsleigh, as well as the many years of friendship that have followed.

Lisa Bloom (Thiedeman)



2000 Leavers 25 Year Reunion

The Class of 2000 celebrated their 25-year reunion on Saturday 25 October at the Harbour View Hotel in The Rocks, with around 40 alumni coming together for an evening filled with laughter, nostalgia and reconnection. We were fortunate to be joined by Old Girls from across Australia and the region, with women coming in from Perth, Singapore and Dunedoo. It was wonderful to catch up, hear how everyone is going and to be reassured that no one has changed despite the years! The night was a heartfelt reminder of the enduring spirit of our year group and the friendships that continue to connect us, even after 25 years.

Caroline Hugall (Kell) and Christine Thackray (Kafalias)



2005 Leavers 20 Year Reunion

The 20-year school reunion was held at Firehouse, North Sydney, in September. We had leavers attending from all over NSW and interstate! It was a great opportunity to catch up on everyone's news, from new babies to new jobs. We are already looking forward to the next reunion.

Shreya Aggarwala, Annabel Hawker and Sarah Wragge



2010 Leavers 15 Year Reunion

On 23 August 2025, the Class of 2010 celebrated their 15-year reunion. It has been a long 10 years between reunions (we missed our 10-year because of the pandemic) but being together again felt like no time had passed. It was a special night filled with lots of food and laughter, reminiscing about various school memories, our favourite teachers and everything else in between.

It was also lovely catching up and hearing about what everyone has been up to, from engagements and marriages to new and experienced mums, to travel stories, sporting accomplishments and boss-lady career moves. It was all very inspiring to hear.

We truly are an incredible and special year group; I am in awe of what we have already accomplished and I am excited for what is to come. I have no doubt that whatever that may be, we'll succeed in our own ways.

Thank you to everyone who came to the reunion and we look forward to seeing everyone at our next one in 2030.

Eunice Fung



2015 Leavers 10 Year Reunion

The Class of 2015 gathered for a relaxed afternoon at The Oaks in Neutral Bay to celebrate our 10-year reunion. The catch-up was filled with familiar faces, plenty of conversation and reflections on the past decade. It was a great opportunity to reconnect and appreciate how far we've all come since our school days.

Jamie Boniface, Lucinda Evennett and Adelaide Taylor



2020 Leavers 5 Year Reunion

In May, the Class of 2020 gathered for their five-year reunion at The Oaks in Neutral Bay. It was a wonderful opportunity to catch up on where everyone is today and to reminisce about cherished school memories. The 2020 leavers continue to share a strong connection to the School while embracing new opportunities and adventures beyond it.

Annabelle Chapman, Ella Turner, Elizabeth Ramsay and Lucinda Wertheimer





Dallas Diane McCullough (Hartog, 1961)

28 August 1944 to 14 July 2025

Dallas Diane McCullough, known as Diane or Di her whole life and 'Darney' to her family, passed away peacefully in her home in July 2025.

Born in 1944 in Bingara, the third of four children and only girl to Dallas and Vera, Diane attended Bingara primary school. As a young girl, her interests were sewing, pony club, piano, card games, Chinese checkers and catching up with her extended family in the district.

Diane became a boarder at Abbotsleigh from 1957 to 1961 and reminisced fondly of the lifelong friends she made. She also became a Vice Boarder Prefect. Diane loved a celebration and socialising – always speaking with such interest and joy of her Abbotsleigh Old Girls' functions, events and reunions over the years.



From left: Jenny Laing-Peach, Helen Page, Diane Hartog and Jocelyn Harris

A critical thinker with an analytical and mathematical mind, Diane wanted to be an accountant but her father told her she could be a nurse or a teacher. So, to keep along the numbers path, she chose to be a maths teacher. She graduated Teachers College, becoming a maths teacher in 1964 and then a boarder mistress at Tara Anglican School for Girls for six years.

After this, Diane worked as a medical secretary in Beecroft and it was there that she met her husband Russell, a paediatrician, whom she married in 1971. Together they settled in Kings Langley, close to hospitals where Russell worked, and Diane became her husband's medical secretary.

When Diane started her family (Fiona and Margaret), she became an active school and community parent with her daughters' schools, the P&C, local netball club, dance schools and later a valued volunteer in Kings

Langley Neighbourhood Watch. She was quite vocal about current affairs, especially homelessness, domestic violence and the cost of living, writing many an email to Members of Parliament.

Throughout her life, Diane had many achievements: supporting Russell through his remarkable recovery after a cerebral haemorrhage; succeeding in her market research career; and selfless acts of contribution to various medical research projects and fundraisers.

Diane always encouraged learning and instilled the importance of education. She was kind, caring, hardworking and incredibly loyal. She was proud of her daughters and adored her grandchildren Avalon, Levi and Layla. She mentored many and was always happy to lend a hand, helping people get a job or new skill, including babysitting a neighbour's children one day a week so the mother could learn to drive and get her licence. Being a numbers wiz, Diane also happily helped any neighbour's children in maths tutoring.



Abbotsleigh Prefects: Diane is fourth from the left

They say you take the girl out of the country but you can't take the country out of the girl, and being a girl from the bush, Diane was practical, handy and resourceful. She had amazing sewing prowess, making dresses and outfits from scratch including dance costumes for her daughters. She was always stylish and dressed well, all the way up to her final medical appointments.

Diane loved an adventure and enjoyed travelling overseas, the NSW countryside, locally or on a day trip to visit friends and family. She partnered up with her



Diane McCullough with Anne Mitchell (Macfarlane, 1964) and Sarah Hofman (Dowsett, 1986) at an Abbotsleigh Old Girls' Union Card Day.

friend and another Abbotsleigh Old Girl Anne Mitchell (Macfarlane, 1964) to visit Dubbo, Wagga Wagga and Tamworth as part of the Abbotsleigh Boarder Expo and again in Tamworth and Goonoo Goonoo for the Old Girls' reunions. Together they also volunteered at the Royal Easter Show Country Women's Association Tea Room, holidayed, talked late into the night, watched the tennis and enjoyed regular dinners at the Hills Club. Later in life, Diane loved her bus trips, ones that took her to tourist attractions and gave her opportunities to make new friends. She embraced the experiences, adventures and chatting with the locals.

An intelligent and wise person, Diane could be stubborn, brave, and quite strong for such a petite lady.

Her strong belief in family and life saw her courageously fight cancer for more than two years. She is survived and dearly missed by her two daughters, three grandchildren, her relatives and friends.

Fiona McCullough and Margaret McCullough

More memories from schoolfriends

We all loved Di – she was reliably good humoured, kind and generous. She could be relied upon to see the funny side of boring or serious situations and could relieve tensions by a dry or caustic remark. No one could put on airs or be too pretentious while Di was around.

I have never forgotten the day we started our Leaving Certificate exams. These were important and the first time any of us had sat a public examination. English literature was always the first exam and *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens was one of our set texts. This is a very long book and Di had threatened all year that she wasn't going to read it. Walking in silence down the road towards the hall where we were to take the exam, everyone was very nervous and tense when

Di announced: 'Well, I started reading Davy Copperfield last night. It's a pity I didn't start earlier, it looks quite good!' The tension was broken, we all roared laughing and went into the exam quite relaxed. Thank you, Di.

Back then, I don't recall that we were overly concerned about our appearance. We didn't have make-up or the amazing hairdos of today's young women but it was always tacitly agreed that Diane was the prettiest and she kept her good looks and her humour throughout her life. I shall certainly miss her friendship, our occasional meetings and our frequent long chats on the phone.

Jocelyn Ellis (Harris, 1961)

Our school days were wonderful years. We had been talking regularly in the past few years. At school we had a great group of friends that have kept in touch over the years. Of the group, only Marilyn and I are still here.

After leaving school, Di was my bridesmaid and I was at her wedding in Bingara. We did not see each other much after that as Di went to live in Sydney and I went to western Queensland but we always kept in touch and every Christmas there was either a card or a phone call. When I moved to Brisbane, occasionally we would meet, either in Sydney or Brisbane. Di never changed over the years and when we met it was just like we were back at school. I think of Di and of all the fun we had.

Julianne Bligh (McLean, 1961)

My many memories are of our younger days as Abbotsleigh boarders. I cherish those memories. I remember well the last reunion, when a few of us travelled to Sydney. We had a couple of extra days so Di joined us at Manly for another catch-up day. May Di rest in peace and may her memory live on in our hearts.

Marilyn Rollings (Maunder, 1961)





Helen Leah **Streeter** (Burt, 1949)

30 March 1932 to 17 July 2025

Helen was born in Neutral Bay and spent most of her life living on the North Shore, particularly in Killara. She sadly passed away on the 17 July 2025 at the ripe old age of 93.

She was the firstborn of Alec and Anne, big sister to twins Judith and Janet and her two brothers, Bill and Ian. On 1 September 1961, she married Oscar – better known as George to all his friends. She was stepmother to Richard and Rosemary, mother to Alex, mother-in-law to Chizuko and grandma to Randle, Douglas, Winston and, most recently, to Yu.

Helen was very independent and until the end lived by herself in her two-bedroom apartment in Killara; she was still driving up to the age of 92. She was sharp as a tack. After George passed, she managed everything herself – living on her own, driving, cooking, washing, looking after her grandkids and maintaining a busy social life. She went by many names: Mrs Streeter, Helen, Auntie Helen, Mum, Grandma – but the favourite was simply ‘The Hat’. No explanation needed. No matter what name you called her, she was unique, truly one of a kind – thank God!

She loved playing games, not just cards but also golf or the pokies. She was the longest serving member of her beloved Killara Golf Club, as well as the longest serving member of Asquith Leagues Club, Hornsby and North Ryde RSL Clubs. She loved the Royal Easter Show and was also one of the longest serving members of the Royal Agricultural Society. She would go every day of the show, catching the train and the bus. She was known by every one of the staff in the Members Stand. She simply loved the pomp and ceremony.



Every year, Helen went proudly to the Anzac Day Service; she marched for Remembrance Day and other events; and regularly attended the RSL, Masonic Club and Combined services, sub-branch committee meetings, luncheons and social events.

Helen was an amazing, caring person who always put others before herself. She loved to gamble;

she cherished her family and friends, but she especially loved Chizie and her grandkids: Randle, Douglas, Winston and her latest addition, Yu.

Signing off with her iconic farewell: God bless, and sweet dreams.

Rest in peace, Helen.

Her loving son, Alex





Jane Marsh (1969)

Died on 21 September 2025

Jane was an Abbotsleigh girl from about 1960 through to 1969. She didn't win academic or sporting trophies but was very happy and left school with many lifelong friends. She was involved in organising some school reunions and maintained her friendship group throughout her life. Jane died on 21 September in Bowral Private Hospital, where she had been admitted with breathing difficulties.

Jane and the Village Marsh Quilters

I met Jane at the Quilting Bee, a patchwork shop in Gordon, in 1996. They were running a course for UFOs – Unfinished Objects. Jane was completing her navy and maroon sampler quilt and I was finishing my eight-year-old son's cot quilt. A core friendship group formed, including Verity Hinwood and Sally Biles. This group continued to meet, as one semester did not see our projects completed. Each week the conversation would continue in Brew Haha, a coffee shop a few shops along from the Quilting Bee.

One of the teachers at the Quilting Bee suggested that as we were operating as a sit and sew group, we could form our own sewing group – we did not need to keep paying for weekly classes – I think she was bored with us. We went ahead and an ad hoc fortnightly group formed. By the time the Quilting Bee had closed, and the group were meeting at the Killara Village quilt shop, we became regularised.

Jane, being a fine organiser, set to and drew up an annual program of Monday fortnight meetings, the venue shared around – and coffee and cake was now fully integrated with the sewing. In recognition of her leadership, the group named itself as the Village Marsh Quilters.

Fortnightly Monday evening meetings continued for several years, until Jane moved to the Longhouse, on Burradoo Road, Bowral. She continued to draw up the roster for the group and organised the first of what was to become annual quilting weekend aways. Jane was linked into a patchwork shop in Mittagong and arranged a Saturday class for us to make a Christmas Angel/calico doll. This weekend became notorious. Picture it: winter in Mittagong, a sewing class in an upstairs balcony with one wall of louvre windows. The wind whistled through the slats and no escape was available in our accommodation – with its unlined walls and concrete floors. Us North Shore matrons could not cope. From then on, we moved venues – using Craigieburn, the Briars and Dormie House when in the Southern Highlands.

On our weekends away Jane would sleep at home with her mum and sew and shop with us during the day (constant mobile phone conversations allowing). When we changed destinations – Berry or Blackheath, both locations with quilting shops – Jane and I would room together. The quilting done on these weekends included working on our own projects, undertaking a common project and making charity quilts.

The Village Marsh Quilters began to complete friendship quilts for members with significant birthdays ending in a zero. These quilts were presented at the annual weekend away. Jane participated in the earliest of these quilts made and indeed was a recipient herself. After completing her sampler quilt, Jane moved onto creating for her family – a gorgeous cream 'crazy quilt' for her mum and then a stream of baby quilts as the Marsh family expanded into the next generation.

Jane also attended the Quilters' annual Christmas dinners in Sydney and kept up a Sydney bolthole via membership of the Yacht Squadron. There, she hosted lovely lunches for the Quilters and at least one Christmas in July.

Jane was a very social person – a joiner, but never just a passive attender. She joined the CWA and was part of the committee which ran the CWA Tulip Time participation. For many years Jane made the charity quilt to be raffled. She also invited the Village Marsh Quilters to attend local quilt shows in the Bowral Art Gallery and the Mittagong RSL.

While Mrs Marsh was still semi-independent and connected via mobile phone, Jane and I tacked onto the annual weekends away driving holidays to Adelaide and the Barossa Valley; to Tasmania and to Melbourne via regional Victoria – dropping into just a few patchwork shops along the way! We took turnabout for the driving, while I was responsible for the itinerary and Jane was responsible for logistics – she arranged the kitty and always had a thermos and the makings of a cuppa, including little milks.

While Jane's mum objected to being 'put in the kennel' (Kenilworth Gardens, residential aged care in Bowral), these annual jaunts continued until 2016 and only ceased while the planning was under way for the Alice Springs/Ghan holiday. By this time Mrs Marsh was in Abbey House, out from Mittagong, and was becoming increasingly frail. As I had leave booked, I was available

to be with Jane as she coped with the loss of the anchor in her life.

Jane continued to keep in touch with the Quilters, hosting lovely lunches in her new home in Rosevale. She and I also had lovely weeks together, sewing, walking the dogs and just talking. Jane was a marvellous hostess, she loved to cook and was addicted to TV cooking shows. She especially loved to cook for family and friends – we would drive to a coffee shop but never to a restaurant for an evening meal.

Jane had belonged to the Gardening Club and was very knowledgeable about plants. She continued to employ a gardener when she became physically unable.

The gardener was always under strict instructions! Spring was a delight for sight and smell in all her gardens – Wahroonga (with its huge daphne bush), Burradoo (with daffodils along the driveway and swathes of bearded iris around the fruit trees) and Bowral (with its lavender bushes and climbing roses).

I can see her now – Jane on her blue lounge, the TV on, mobile phone at the ready with Pippa and Sweet Pea at her feet; the sun streaming in the window and the Manchurian pear covered in blooms. I miss her so much.

Barb McLean

Sally Fielding (Chitty, 1986)

29 March 1969 to 4 July 2024



Sally was born in Canterbury, Kent, in the UK and was the third of four children. She had a slightly nomadic childhood, spending her first three years in the UK before moving to Lae in Papua New Guinea in 1973. The family then moved around Australia, finally settling in St Ives in 1979 where Sally went to St Ives Central Primary, and then in 1981 to Abbotsleigh for Year 7.

She had a full life at school, throwing herself into study, friendships and sports. She particularly loved playing softball and netball, and became a prefect and Pritchard house captain in her final years.

After finishing school, she went to UTS to study nursing and eventually became a clinical nurse specialist in oncology. She subsequently went on to gain a Master's in Public Health and spent the latter part of her working life in cancer research.

Sally married Mike and was the most wonderful mother to her three children. She had a zest for life,

loved travelling and playing netball, and always had her camera out. She cared deeply for her friends and family, had a strong Christian faith and had a smile that would light up the room.

Sally passed away in July 2024 after a short battle with bile duct cancer. Her early passing leaves a huge gap in the lives of those who loved her and we miss her every day.

Rest in peace, beautiful Sal.

Natalie Bradekji (Chitty, 1983)



We remember

Wendy **Drover** (Budden, 1958). Died 21 August 2025

Shirley **Garnock** (Taylor, 1945). Died 16 June 2025

Margaret **Morris** (1947). Died 14 November 2025

Catherine **Oakeshott** (Murray, 1948). Died 30 December 2024

Robin **Walsh** (Parker-Smith, 1960). Died 20 September 2025

Susan **Reed** (Dobson, 1964). Died 9 September 2025

Jane **Reid** (1972). Died 11 July 2025

Christine **Townend** (Woolcott, 1962). Died 15 August 2025

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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