



PLC
PRESBYTERIAN
LADIES' COLLEGE
SYDNEY
— 1888 —

STORIES FROM THE ARCHIVES:

Recollections of a Boarder from the mid-1950s

Wendy Gray (Rabonne) attended PLC Sydney from 1953-1957. In her final year Wendy was School Captain, Boarding Prefect and Harper House Vice-Captain. In 2013 the College celebrated its 125th anniversary and Wendy, along with other previous School Captains, contributed recollections of her school days to the Archives. This is an extract from her contribution. To read the full recollections go to PLC Sydney Archives in the Portal, Topic 10 Recollections of Ex-Students, and the folder Boarders' Recollections.

The drive from Tumut NSW to Croydon took more than 5 hours. After being delivered to the School (aged 12 years) I said goodbye to my parents and waved as they drove away. A feeling of aloneness overwhelmed me! The School had anticipated this for all new boarders and we were partnered with a Senior Boarder for the first few weeks – a good system.

The “School Day” was well organised with definite times. Music practice before breakfast; then after breakfast, tidy room and prepare for Assembly. At Assembly we would hear notices and sing several hymns. We all wore the school uniform of a Black Watch tartan tunic with white blouse and belt, black stockings and black shoes. We would have lessons in our designated classroom. Teachers used a double/sliding blackboard with chalk.

Morning tea was an orange to be eaten in the quadrangle. Lunch was in our formal dining room. After the afternoon lessons we were encouraged to enjoy some sport, wearing a grey tunic tied with a cord (the colour of our appointed House – mine was McQueen at first and later Harper). I particularly enjoyed playing basketball or tennis or, in summer, swimming. I remember doing Swimming Life Saving courses and earning points for my House. On Saturdays we would again play sport and/or be taken on an excursion.

On Sundays we dressed in our white/cream dresses and, wearing turned up white Panama hats (with the school colours, red and white, on the band), we marched in two separate files to either Ashfield or Burwood Presbyterian churches. Then we marched home to enjoy one of my favourite meals: cold sliced meat, hot jacket potatoes and beetroot!



Boarders ready to go to church, 1953

In the afternoon we had an hour “rest” on our beds, no talking! Then we were able to relax in the grounds or play sport or pursue special interests, i.e. photography or book reading with friends from

our year. It was at this time we appreciated the grounds at PLC – diverse and beautiful. The dappled lawn, the rose garden, the front lawn and our grassed basketball courts surrounded on three sides by hedges for privacy. A large Moreton Bay fig tree near the tennis courts and many other lovely trees and shrubs at the front of the School. The imposing grey school building starting with Shubra Hall, through to the second tower and splendid entrance must have inspired some pupils to consider architecture as a profession.



Lunch in the gardens, 1955



After exams, 1956

One of our classrooms was situated at the back of the Assembly Hall. A trapdoor, through the jarrah flooring, near our desks, beckoned some of us to explore under it! We found some old photos of the school there and a few sculptured pieces. This area had been used for “radar” during World War II, we were told. Years later, when I had to supervise a detention group writing lines, and when only half the number of pupils listed were in the Assembly Hall when I arrived, I would say, “Would someone kindly go down the trapdoor and encourage pupils there to come back up!” “How did you know they were there?” someone said. Eventually the area was properly declared “out of bounds”.



Fancy Dress Day, 1957



*Miss Tassie, Acting Principal, and Prefects, 1957
Wendy Rabone is standing, 4th from the left*

The Dining Room had tables for ten except for a smaller table for the Principal. Different years were represented at each table; a senior pupil at the head of the table. There were definite “at table rules”. For example, we were not allowed to ask for anything to be passed to us (i.e. the pepper pot); we were

expected to notice if anyone needed, say, “the pepper”. We learnt to say “Would you like the pepper, Margaret?” when we actually wanted it! My husband, Keith, over the past almost 50 years, has not been able to change this in me!

The main meal in the evenings was two courses. It was a weekly menu cycle. Always fish on a Friday; corned beef with white sauce, cabbage and carrots on a Thursday. Dessert may be chocolate blancmange with strawberry jam or vanilla blancmange called “murder in the mud” or “murder in the snow”. Delicious. Another was lemon sago or tapioca called “frogs’ eyes”. Some steamed puddings, stewed or canned fruits with custard or junket, etc. We had a wide variety of desserts.

Sources:

Series 33 Oral Histories & Recollections

Images from Wendy Gray (Rabone) and *Aurora Australis* 1957

