

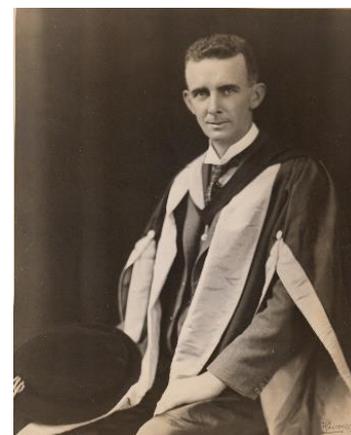


PLC
 PRESBYTERIAN
 LADIES' COLLEGE
 SYDNEY
 — 1888 —

STORIES FROM THE ARCHIVES:

11 December 1929: Speech Day and Dr McQueen's Departure

This was a Speech Day like no other before or since because it marked the very unpleasant departure of the College's second Principal, Dr E. Neil McQueen. Dr McQueen was Vice-Principal from 1916 and Principal from 1920. He was an educational innovator: he introduced the House system with its various competitions, the College's own school certificate, a school camp, and, most important of all, a modified version of the Dalton Plan. Sadly, implementing his educational philosophy, seen by some as too progressive for its time, put him on a collision course with the College Council. Plummeting enrolments and rising debts only accelerated the deterioration of the relationship. Ultimately a "resignation agreement" was drawn up.

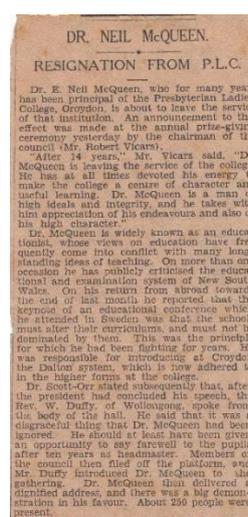


Dr E. Neil McQueen, Principal 1920-1929
 Photo by Harold Cazneaux

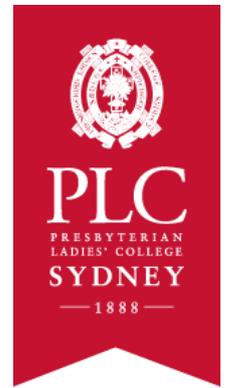
What made Speech Day such a "bun fight" was that Dr McQueen had many supporters amongst staff, students and parents who believed that his dismissal was unjust. The important end-of-year event was covered by *Smith's Weekly*, a tabloid newspaper that attracted readers with sensationalism, satire, controversial opinions with sporting and finance news, short stories, cartoons, and caricatures. The paper utilised a series of colourful headlines in its account: "Parents of Girls are Indignant", "Storm at P.L. College, Croydon", "Petitions against Departure of Popular Principal", and a lead sentence that read, "Church educational circles in Sydney have recently been ruffled by the disclosure of what is tantamount to a sensation in connection with that exclusive scholastic institution, the Presbyterian Ladies' College, Croydon".



Smith's Weekly, 14 December 1929



Sydney Morning Herald, 12 December 1929



For the 250 students, parents and ex-students present in College Hall, it was a long, hot, and stressful afternoon. An eyewitness account by an anonymous author puts the reader right in the midst of the occasion with its references to the girls standing up “in stony silence” as the Acting Principal entered, that “Mr Vicars and Mr Gillespie [Chairman and member of College Council] were a peculiar shade of green”, the Chairman’s speech being interrupted by clapping and stamping that “lasted for five whole minutes”.

The clapping was only stopped when the organ struck up “God Save the King”, after which the official party left College Hall and “locked themselves in the dining room”. In the midst of the “pandemonium” of people trying to speak up in favour of Dr McQueen, who himself was sitting on the platform with his “head in his hands”, “a violent thunder storm started outside and the lightning flashed and the rain fell in torrents”.

While it was a “memorable moment”, it certainly was not a “finer moment” for anyone. Yet the College recovered and went on to reinstate its reputation as a leading girls’ school. And we cherish and have built upon Dr McQueen’s educational innovations.



Dr McQueen and Staff, 1921