

# The Waterloo Society 1950s

Newsletter 2025



## Launch of the Pioneering Women's Trail

September 2025 marks fifty years since the first girls arrived at Wellington College, and a year of celebrations will start with the opening of our Pioneering Women's Trail. Consisting of ten locations around College and linked webpages, the trail will celebrate the contributions and achievements of all women and girls at Wellington.

At first glance, the College of the 1950s might seem an unlikely place to find stories of women. There were no female pupils or teachers, and the whole school was very masculine in character. Nevertheless, behind the scenes, many women were making a valuable contribution.

Wives of Tutors often played an important role in the life of their husband's house or dormitory. One such was Joy, wife of Picton Tutor Rupert Horsley. They were remembered fondly by many OWs for their kindness, and the way they welcomed boys into their family life. Tony Glyn-Jones (Picton 1954–59) especially appreciated this as his parents were overseas, his father having been posted to BAOR.

Another was Heather Letts, whose husband, Philip, was Tutor of the Anglesey from 1951. An educated woman, Heather had worked in the Hydrographic Department of the Admiralty before her marriage, and during the War had taught Geography at Wellington. In the 1950s, according to one Anglesey boy, she *'took a special interest in the wellbeing of the "squealers",'* and must have provided much comfort to those who were



▲ 'Ma Bennett' and staff, 1958

homesick. The Letts also regularly took parties of boys skiing in the Alps during the Christmas holidays. In the archives is a beautiful souvenir album of one of these trips, compiled for Heather by Christopher Bulteel.

Domestic duties in 1950s dormitories were still performed by men, the celebrated 'jallies', but the outer boarding Houses were often staffed by a Matron and her helpers. Peggy

D'Arch Smith of the Benson was described by OW Anthony Bruce as *'a great refuge in a storm, if or when there was a need... so good to us all'*. Her predecessor was Miss Wilson, later Mrs Paterson. Talbot staff of the 1950s included Miss Collet, Mrs Hatch and Mrs Ekins, while Stanley boys may remember Miss Lupton, Miss Thorne or Mrs Elwin. All appear on House photos, but we know very little about them, so would love to hear any memories! ►

Another group of redoubtable women were 'Ma Bennett', the Matron-in-College, and her team, who were responsible for College linen and for mending clothing. Wellingtonians who spent time in the Sanatorium – and almost all did, during their school careers – could rely on the care of the rather formidable Miss Hall, the Matron there, and her team of much more friendly and approachable nurses. In 1957, the Matron's post was taken by Miss Attenborough.

Opportunities to meet girls of their own age were very limited for 1950s Wellingtonians. Occasionally, the College would host a dance to which

girls from Luckley School or Elmhirst Ballet School would be bussed in to act as partners. Most OWs felt in retrospect that their attempts to make small talk with these girls were sadly lacking. A few of the staff had daughters of 'dateable' age, but more had younger children, and employed au pairs, mostly Scandinavian. These young women were the focus of much attention; and one OW even managed to stay in touch with one of them; they were married three years after leaving Wellington!

▼ Photo of Heather Letts (front row) and Anglesey House, 1952



▲ Heather Letts with Wellington boys and staff on a ski trip to St Veran, 1951



▲ Joy and Rupert Horsley with the boys of the Picton, 1951

**The Pioneering Women's Trail aims to tell the stories of all women at Wellington, many of whom, particularly the domestic staff, may have been overlooked. We'd love to hear any stories of the women who influenced your time at College.**

## Teenage culture at 1950s Wellington

The 1950s was a decade of some social change, in which first America, then Britain, saw the rise of popular culture aimed specifically at a new phenomenon – the teenager. Perhaps for the first time, the music and fashions popular with young people were very different from those of their parents.

The Wellington College of that time was a conservative, even reactionary, institution, and so these trends took a while to permeate. This was partly due to financial constraints – the British economy was still struggling to recover from the Second World War – and partly to class consciousness. As Martin Kinna (Murray 1953–58) put it, 'Elvis had certainly arrived, but I think in our tweed-jacketed, cavalry twill-trousered way, most of us thought he was rather common'. The dormitory gramophone at the end of the corridor played an eclectic mix of classical music, jazz, hits from musicals and popular crooners such as Frank Sinatra and Doris Day.

During the second half of the decade, rock'n'roll began to gain ground. Andrew Dewar-Durie (Talbot 1953–56) remembered that 'someone's father sent a 45 record of Elvis Presley's Hound Dog from the USA. We were riveted and played it over and over again'. William Young's (Anglesey 1954–58) stepfather was stationed in Berlin, so his summer holidays were spent with the American community there. With his American girlfriend, he learnt to jive and attended the first screening of *Rock Around The Clock*. David Cooke (Hopetoun 1955–59) recalled that 'in the Hopetoun, Heartbreak Hotel was regularly played at full volume'. By the end of the decade, Wellingtonians could hear new music on the jukebox in a cafe in Upper Crowthorne.

Wellington's strict and conservative dress code meant that the boys had little opportunity to adopt new fashions. However, in the midst of

such conformity, even small variations such as brightly coloured socks were a means of self-expression, and gradually the boundaries were pushed further. A 1955 *Wellingtonian* editorial described 'a new set of "College Dandies"' who sported an 'ever-increasing number of multi-coloured waistcoats, 17 ½ inch "peg-tops", collars whose points seem to vanish round the back of the neck, and carefully lacquered heads.' Narrow, 'drainpipe' trousers were the height of fashion, and surprisingly, the College Matrons could often be persuaded to make such alterations to boys' existing garments. Nevertheless, the only place where most Wellington boys would see true 'Teddy Boy' style was on a visit to the College Mission in Walworth.

Sometimes the tensions between old and new were played out at Wellington. Tom Courtenay-Clack recalled that his Tutor, Hugh Marsden, disapprovingly described modern dancing as "Body clutching! Upright fornication!" At a debate in 1956, the motion 'This House would rather listen to Classical music

than to jazz or rock'n'roll' was narrowly carried by 18 votes to 16 with three abstentions. Two years later, teacher 'POG' White, perhaps somewhat tongue-in-cheek, proposed the motion that 'The dress, music and general behaviour of the teenagers of today are signs that England's downfall has begun', the opposition being led by James Wort. Numerous students spoke in what was by all accounts a hilarious debate, and a record house of 105 voted against the motion by an overwhelming majority.



▲ Listening to the wireless in the Hardinge, 1950s (courtesy of Thomas Courtenay-Clack)



▲ Student skiffle band 'The Blue Angels' playing at the College Dance, 1957 (courtesy of Thomas Courtenay-Clack)

## Giving back with the gift of an education

We are deeply grateful to all members of the Waterloo Society – OWs and friends of the College – who have pledged a gift to Wellington in their Will

As a member, you are invited to special events each year, including the OW Reunion, the OW Carol Service and an annual Waterloo Society gathering. You will also receive a pin badge as a token of thanks, and your name will be added to our Legacy Giving Tree in the Living Legacy Garden – a lasting tribute for loved ones to visit.

Supporting Wellington College with a gift or donation in your Will is a highly personal and unique way of giving and can also lessen the burden of Inheritance Tax on your executors. As a registered charity, all legacy gifts made to the College are exempt from UK Inheritance and Capital Gains Taxes.

We understand that family and loved ones come first when making your Will. However, after providing for those closest to you, remembering Wellington – however modestly – can leave a lasting impact.

Residuary gifts are particularly valuable, as they are inflation-proof and grow with the value of your estate. A residuary gift is what remains after all bequests, debts and expenses are settled. This can be the whole residue or a percentage – even 1% – shared between family, friends and charities. Just 1% left to Wellington could help transform a bright young person's life through a bursary.

By including a gift in your Will, you will help shape the future of Wellington and ensure generations of students benefit from the opportunities you once enjoyed.

If you would like to discuss leaving a legacy, please contact Cindy Price or Lucy Taylor, Deputy Directors of Development. You are under no obligation to tell us, but if you do, we would be delighted to keep you updated and include you in the Waterloo Society. You can notify us by returning the enclosed form or completing it online at:

[forms.office.com/e/CxgnGmx73e](https://forms.office.com/e/CxgnGmx73e)



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You may well have been a Founder when you were at Wellington. While the need for supporting Founders has, thankfully, diminished over the years, the College's ambition to ensure that children of talent and promise, but without the financial means, are able to attend College, is stronger than ever. I am delighted that the legacy I intend to leave will enable a student to grow in stature and confidence and take part in the Wellington life that has served me so well.”

Sir David Scholey, CBE (Bn 53)

**Save the date**  
OW Carol Service  
Tuesday 9th December



Following the incredible success of last year's inaugural OW Carol Service, the Wellington Community are thrilled to be hosting it once again at the beautiful All Souls Church on Tuesday 9th December, from 7pm. Led by Will Stileman (T 81), the evening promises to be a joyful celebration of community, music and festive spirit. The tickets are complimentary and include refreshments.

To book your place, please find it towards the bottom of the Events page at [wellycom.net/all-events/](https://wellycom.net/all-events/) or call the Community Office on 01344 444023 and we would be happy to help. Alternatively, email the team on [community@wellingtoncollege.org.uk](mailto:community@wellingtoncollege.org.uk).

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To find out more about the College's history, please visit our heritage website:  
[wellingtoncollegehistory.co.uk](https://wellingtoncollegehistory.co.uk)