The Waterloo Society 1960s

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 1960s 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 Heather Letts, whose husband, Philip, was Tutor of the Anglesey until 1967. 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. As a Tutor's wife, 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 homesick.

Domestic duties in 1960s dormitories were generally performed by men, the celebrated 'jallies,' but the outer boarding Houses were often staffed by a Matron and her helpers. Peggy D'Arch Smith, Matron of the Benson throughout the decade, is remembered fondly by many Wellingtonians. Miss Besant worked in the Talbot throughout the 1960s, sometimes aided by Mrs Durran, while Stanley boys may remember Mrs Elwin. All appear on House photos, but we know very little about them, so we would love to hear any of your memories!



Annabel Browne (Ap 69), the first girl at Wellington



Miss Besant, Talbot Matron



Mrs D'Arch Smith, Benson Matron



Mrs Durran of the Talbot



Mrs Mabel Bennett, Matron-in-College

Another group of redoubtable women were the Matron-in-College and her team, who were responsible for College linen and for mending clothing. Until 1965 this post was taken by 'Ma Bennett'; on her retirement, the Yearbook paid tribute to her *'briskness, kindliness and flow of conversation to be found nowhere else in College'*, and noted *'her habit of referring to every boy by his number – "342 and 438 have been very naughty boys over their laundry, but you won't punish them, will you?"'* ▶

Wellingtonians who spent time in the Sanatorium – and almost all did, during their school careers – could rely on the care of Miss Attenborough and then Miss MacMichael, whose skill and efficiency were, according to the Yearbook *'very charmingly exercised'*. In 1971, she married long-serving Wellington teacher Robert Moss.

Opportunities to meet girls of their own age were somewhat limited for 1960s Wellingtonians. The College Dance, to which girls from nearby schools were invited, seems to have died out early in the decade but, in 1965, girls from Daneshill School took some of the female parts in Wellington drama productions for the first time. In 1966, the Stanley play *Post Horn Gallop* featured four girls from Queen Anne's School, Caversham; the *Wellingtonian's* review commented that *'Girls are no longer all that is needed to make a college production a success'*, but a handful of girls from nearby schools continued to augment Wellington drama and music productions for the rest of the decade.

On Speech Day 1968, the Master, Frank Fisher, mentioned that before long, *'we may be urged to take some girls into our Sixth Form'*. This prediction was of course to come to pass in 1975, but the very first Wellington girl was Annabel Browne, an OW's daughter who joined the Sixth Form for one term in 1969 with the intention of gaining a place at Oxford, an ambition which she quickly fulfilled with an Exhibition to St Hugh's College.

Just think
If girls were here:
Long hair at College!
Faces worth watching
Across the aisle.
Teacher distracted
By shapely legs;
Heart softened
By female frailty
Teacher defeated
By feminine charm!
Figures to study
(Not mathematical!)
Rules to be broken . . .
If only girls were here,
Just think . . .

▲ Extract replicated from a poem in the *Wellingtonian* about girls, 1969



▲ 'Ma Bennett' and staff, 1958

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.

In search of the 1960s

What defines the school experiences of a generation? At a boarding school there are so many factors – your contemporaries, your interests and the traditions and customs of the school itself. Nevertheless, the Headmaster and teaching staff must exert one of the strongest influences.

For those here in the earlier 1960s, the Master was of course Graham Stainforth, informally known as 'Gus' because of the appearance of his initials, 'GHS'. Uniquely in the annals of Wellington, he had been first a pupil at College (as a Foundationer) in the 1920s, then a teacher from 1934 to 1945, before returning as Master in 1956. 'Gus's' public persona was that of a stern disciplinarian, austere and largely humourless. Many younger boys were frightened of him, and very few wanted to get on his wrong side. In part, this emphasis on discipline was a reaction to the regime of his predecessor, Wilfred House, which some felt had been too lax. Those few pupils who got to know him better, perhaps as Prefects or Heads of College, tended to revise their view, finding him fair and even likeable. Certainly, his private writings reveal a thoughtful man, wryly self-deprecating and willing to admit how challenging his role could be.

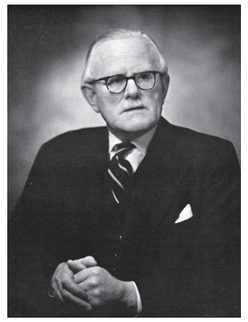
He was succeeded in 1966 by Frank Fisher, a different character for a different age. Within College, he faced the late 60s zeitgeist, which questioned authority, tradition and the value of being an 'all-rounder'; externally, a political climate which threatened to destroy the public schools. Fisher is generally remembered as a successful Master who presided over two major and successful financial appeals, modernised student life by means of communal areas and the cafeteria system, raised academic standards, and made the move to admit girls to the Sixth Form. As Chairman of Headmasters' Conference and the Rugby group of Headteachers, he led the public schools' defence against the Labour Government and provided an example of modern management.

A look at the teaching staff of the 1960s reveals a tale of contrasts. In 1965, the senior members of Common Room comprised no fewer than eleven men who had been at Wellington since the 1930s. They include names who have gone down in College history: Rupert Horsley, Arnold Potter, Bob Storrar, James Wort, Anthony Crawley, Graham Meikle and Robert Moss. At the other end of the scale were those of a newer generation, such as Peter 'POG' White, whose choice of dark-coloured shirts was seen as daring, and David Ward, President and frequent host of the fashionable Bohemian Union. Others such as Roger Gedye, John Martin and Mike Fox all put in long careers at Wellington, but how are they remembered by those they taught?

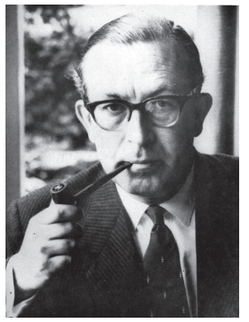
Later this year we will launch the 1960s phase of our 'Wellington Through The Decades' project, asking those who were Wellington pupils during the decade to send in their memories of that time. We'll be sending out a questionnaire covering many areas of school life – not just teaching, but living conditions, leisure activities, sport and much more. Even then, you don't need to restrict yourself to these categories! Any submissions, long or short, will be welcome. We would also love to receive photographs from the period, or copies of your letters, diaries, school reports, and so on. Look out for our communication in a few months' time.

All responses will be stored in the archives and will be used to create a series of pages on our Wellington Heritage website. You can see here the pages which have already been compiled from the first phase of the project, covering the 1940s and 1950s: **https://wellingtoncollegehistory.co.uk/project/overview**.

In the meantime, if you'd like to refresh your memories of the decade, why not watch our online event from 2020 when we interviewed four of the 1960s teachers? You'll find it here: **https://wellingtoncollegehistory.co.uk/film/common-room-of-the-1960s**.



▲ Graham Stainforth (8th Master, 1956–66)



▲ Frank Forman Fisher, 1966 (9th Master, 1966–79)



▲ Peter White, History and Religious Studies Teacher

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**



"My father was in the Indian Army but was invalided out at the end of the War. He was never a well man and when it came to an education for his two sons, he sought advice from his former Commanding Officer, Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck. As a result, we came to Wellington. Both my parents died whilst we were there and I suspect that we both became Foundationers. I never knew and certainly there was no distinction at College. That is entirely within the founding spirit of the College and why I have decided to leave some money to College in my Will so that others may benefit as I did."
Charles Garraway (C 65)

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/** or call the Community Office on 01344 444023 and we would be happy to help. Alternatively, email the team on **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