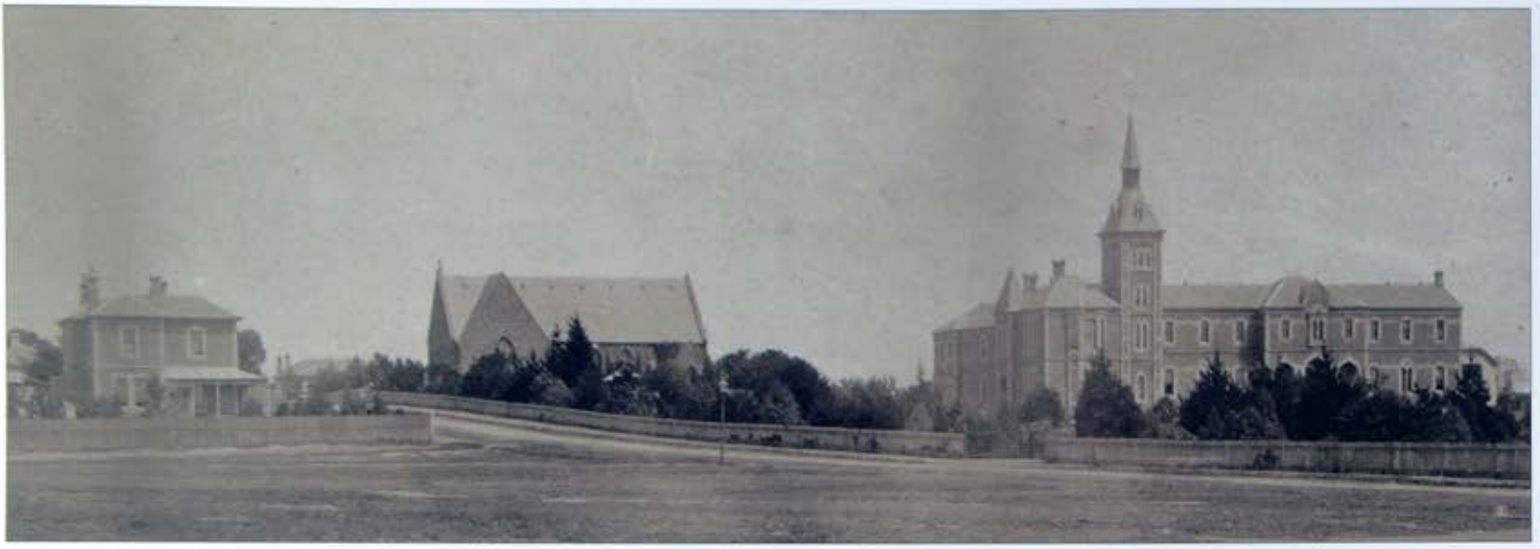
Chapter Two

The Morrisons' College

The large building and ample grounds were grand, indeed, and soon attracted many new enrolments: 57 in 1871, 30 in 1872, 60 in 1873 and 50 in 1874. A new wing was added in 1873, with room for an extra twenty-two boarders, as well as another classroom and a swimming bath. Mr Morrison also continued to add to the property, which by 1873 was already 15 acres. By 1874, boarders comprised half of the total enrolment of 120; in fact, the demand for boarding was so high that not all applicants could be accepted – a situation that must have greatly pleased the Principal, although it did demand attention to immediate extensions.[1] He was proud of the high boarding standards at the school and the lack of serious illness, helped by good natural drainage and bountiful fresh air at a time when diseases such as typhoid and measles caused deaths in other boarding schools.[2] In 1887, an outbreak of typhoid at Geelong Grammar was so severe that its impact decimated the boarding house with 28 of the 64 boys leaving to escape infection.[3]

There were no such outbreaks at the College, and enrolments grew steadily. Twelve boys transferred from Geelong Grammar in 1873 and 1874; their parents were almost definitely lured by the superior academic results won by students at the College. In 1875, Mr Morrison deliberately increased school fees to deter some families and limit numbers. But new families were not put off by the fee increase, so Mr Morrison continued to spend money on surrounding property. It was in this decade that the College began to establish itself as a boarding school for sons of Western District pastoralists, especially from Colac and Camperdown, but also from Warrnambool and Horsham, and from the large outlying sheep stations and smaller towns.[4] By 1878, the school had 20 acres: 'the most extensive school-grounds in the Colony ... Of this, five acres have been fenced off specially for cricket, laid down with English grass ... Twelve acres are available for football, and as a natural result of this advantage, the Geelong College Football Team has been unbeaten during the year.' By 1886, the property was 25 acres.[5] Students also had a gymnasium that was extensively used.

Hundreds of people assembled at the Prize Night in 1872 at the Mechanics Institute heard about the College's fifteen successful Matriculation students – including 14-year-old William Carstairs – and learnt that this number was second only to the great Scotch College in Melbourne.[6] Such success led to allegations of cramming and an undue focus on the Matriculation class. These were hotly and publicly denied, and the solid academic foundations given to younger students by their teachers were mentioned. Mr Morrison even declared his wish for an external examination system to



The College buildings showing the extended wing

be extended to junior classes and the results publicly reported for all to see. Such a system would be 'of incalculable benefit', he said, but until then the community had to trust him that 'the instruction of the lower classes has been performed with no less efficiency than that of the University class'.[7] He would not live to see the introduction of the Leaving and Intermediate examinations in Victoria. We know, however, that all boys at the College were part of a rigorous and demanding system that, by 1875, tested their learning every week. Every Friday, under the scrutiny of the Reverend Campbell, boys were tested on their week's work: 'Nothing is better calculated to secure the attention of a boy to every master's teaching than the certainty he has of having the week's work overhauled on Friday. Boys who fail in these repetitions have to return to school on Saturday. This arrangement has produced very satisfactory results.'[8]

Thomas Cumming, son of a Western District squatter, who would himself become a wealthy pastoralist, was a boarder from 1874, and during his Matriculation year wrote to his brother Jack: 'There are about twenty fellows [doing Matriculation] and most of them are expected to pass easily. Mr Morrison himself takes the Matric class for a good many things, and makes the fellows work like mad when he has the class.' At the end of the year, he added, 'old Morrison is now howling at us most viciously in his attempts to make the fellows thoroughly prepared for the Matric Exam'.[9] Thomas Cumming passed and was Dux that year. By 1886, we know that a total of 192 College students had passed their Matriculation, and small numbers of Post-Matriculation students continued to be successful at first-year university subjects.

Such intense academic rigour served to heighten further the College's outstanding reputation and increase enrolments, but Mr Morrison continued to aim even higher. Natural Philosophy (later Physics) had been taught since the 1860s, and Chemistry was added to the curriculum in 1874, putting the College at the forefront of science teaching in Victoria, and giving it a head start when Physics, Chemistry, Botany and Physiology were introduced as Matriculation subjects by the University of Melbourne in 1880. Scotch College had taught Science from the 1860s, and Chemistry and Physics laboratories were available by 1873. Science was not included in Melbourne Grammar's curriculum until 1881.[10]

Scotch College also enjoyed good academic results and both Presbyterian boys' schools, as well as the new Presbyterian Ladies' College that opened in 1875, had an enviable and mostly

unchallenged position as providers of the best academic education in Victoria. Edward Morris, soon after he arrived at Melbourne Grammar in 1875 as the new Headmaster, lamented the quality of the Matriculation boys as 'a burden on my mind … I have 40 would be candidates! … and about 8 fit'.[11] Improved results in the 1880s were short-lived, and by the late 1890s the reputations of Melbourne Grammar and Geelong Grammar were considerably inferior to those of The Geelong College and Scotch College.

By 1874, a Post-Matriculation class was established to enable students at The Geelong College to study university subjects at school, and be examined for them as first-year university students.[12] The class was taught by the College's best teachers, including Mr Morrison. The first successful Post-Matriculation student was John Baird, in 1876, the son of a clergyman. He had been an exceptional Matriculation student, too, at age 15, and later completed a medical degree. The College's teachers were praised in this innovative step: 'no other school in the colony has yet attempted these examinations … the wide difference between the first year arts and the matriculation argues well for the scholarship of the College masters'.[13] That students of the College could achieve such academic distinction was a continual source of pride for Mr Morrison: 'It is well to have it generally known that the work done in a Post Matriculation Class is of inestimable value to a boy choosing a professional career, and that no boy should enter the University without first reading Honours for a year at School'.[14] Retaining boys for an extra year was, of course, also an additional source of income for the school.

Life at the College in the early 1870s was captured through a series of letters written by young teacher Arthur Backhouse, who lived there and taught Latin, French, English and History at the school during the second half of 1872. He had studied at Cornell University in New York and his teaching appointment at the College was probably his first. He was one of four teachers, with Mr Hutton, Mr Page and Mr Francis, who taught about one hundred boys. Mr Backhouse had misgivings about Mr Morrison: 'I do not know whether I shall suit him or not for he is always finding fault about nothing of any consequence'.[15] He also found that the Principal had a temper: 'I must be ready at any time to withstand one of his verbal torrents of abuse, which may burst forth when least expected'. In October, Mr Backhouse took students to the Geelong Show, and some mornings he walked the two miles with them to the local baths, ensuring that they were back before 7.30 am.[16] At the end of the school year, more than half of the students took part in a huge gymnastics exhibition, to which 900 invitations were issued to parents and friends. Mr Morrison did not pay to retain his teachers' services during the December–January period, and so Mr Backhouse sought work elsewhere, without any regret, 'owing to Morrison's partiality for low wages and hard work, and also to his general behaviour, which sometimes is almost intolerable lacking not only the polish of a *gentleman*, but also the feeling and courtesy which any sterling man shews towards his brother. He is enough to drive a fellow crazy sometimes.'[17]

Although cut in the Scotch College cloth of academic excellence, The Geelong College was a private enterprise, and Mr Morrison could do what he liked. One of the key differences between the two schools was that the Presbyterian Church could not impose the same stringent controls on the College during its private school period (1864–1907) as it did on Scotch College. For example, in the early 1870s a dispute over land ended in the Church's reasserting its control over Scotch College and reminding its Principal, Alexander Morrison, in no uncertain terms, of his place in the hierarchy.[18] His brother George had his share of challenges in Geelong, but they were far less public. A mass exodus of staff in 1882 has passed virtually unrecorded, save for a handwritten note at the back of that year's Annual Report, which says: 'Whole staff left after 1882 as a result of a

Although cut in the Scotch College cloth of academic excellence, The Geelong College was a private enterprise, and Mr Morrison could do what he liked.

The interior of the gymnasium, c1908

disagreement with Mr Morrison'.[19] The local press is silent; we can only guess that his hot temper or his predisposition to pay staff poorly, as indicated by Mr Backhouse in 1872, may have caused this.

Although the economic depression during the 1890s threatened many other schools with closure, the decade could not have begun in a more positive manner for the College. Mr Morrison became 'The Doctor' in 1891 when the University of Aberdeen conferred on him the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws. Also in 1891, he appointed his son as Vice Principal, thus assuring the future of the College as a 'Morrison' educational institution.

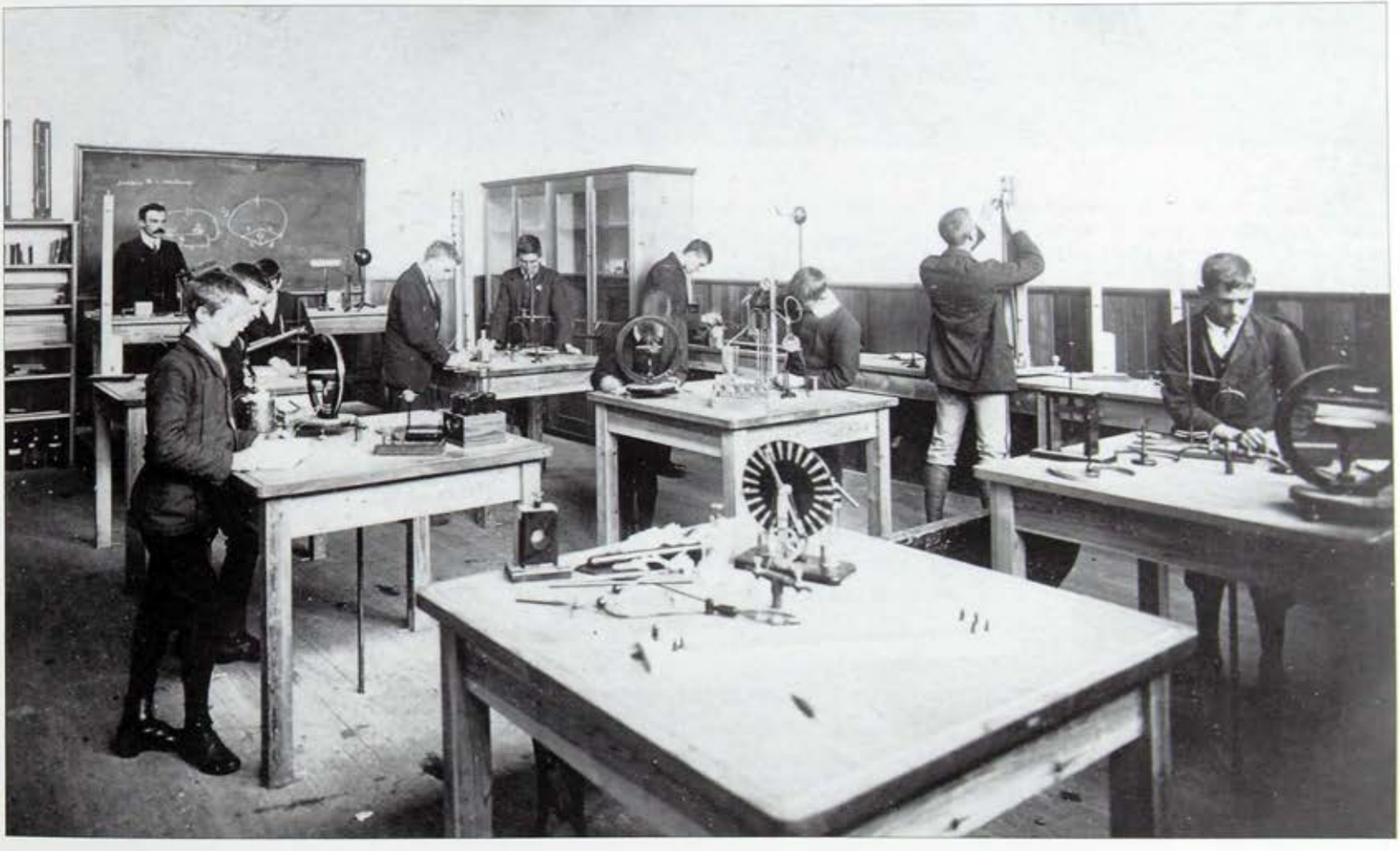
Norman Morrison was the ideal Vice Principal. He had passed Matriculation while at the College in 1883 and was also a successful member of the Post-Matriculation class in 1884. He became a prominent University of Melbourne athlete during his time at Ormond College, from 1885, particularly in football and rowing. He gained his BA in 1886 and his MA with Honours in Classics in 1888, before teaching at Brighton Grammar when the highly regarded educator Dr George Crowther was Headmaster. Norman Morrison was an enthusiastic supporter of the Brighton Grammar Cadet Corps, and also the notion of more regular interschool sport fixtures.[20]

Both Norman Morrison and Dr Crowther were key players in the establishment of the Victorian Schools' Association and the Victorian Amateur Athletics Association, in 1891. Regular football matches were played against King's College, Cumloden, Kew High School, Toorak College and Carlton College; The Geelong College were Premiers every year from 1892, and so by 1896 boasted of being the best school Football Team in the colony.[21] Cricket was played against Cumloden, Kew High, Brighton Grammar, King's College, Caulfield Grammar and Xavier College. By the early 1900s, the school mostly played the 'big' sports of football and cricket against schools in the Public Schools Association – Geelong Grammar, Scotch College and Wesley College, although Brighton Grammar, Caulfield Grammar and University High continued to feature on the list of fixtures.[22] In rifle shooting as well, The Geelong College was enormously successful, winning the Sargood Shield in 1895 when it was first awarded, and again in 1896 and throughout the years from 1901 to 1905. It boasted 145 cadets by 1906 – most of the school's students.

'A sound mind inhabiting a sound body' was a hallmark of public school education and a notion that was expressed regularly at public sports gatherings of the College from the 1870s.[23] Similar opportunities afforded by large playing fields had not been available during the 1860s when the school was at Skene Street. Prizes were regularly awarded for sporting and athletic prowess, as well as for academic success. Two outstanding school athletes, Gus Kearney and Ian Glassford, carried off state and national tennis trophies during the intercolonial tennis matches in Melbourne in 1891. Gus Kearney became the Australian champion, and both boys were greeted back at school 'with a perfect storm of applause'.[24] Norman Morrison's later move to enrol the College among the state's elite sporting secondary schools – Melbourne Grammar, Geelong Grammar, Scotch College, Wesley College and Xavier College – had a sound basis given his emphasis on sporting competition.

Norman Morrison was able to earn the loyalty of other masters and the respect of both staff and students. He was a tall, slender man 'with a boyish face adorned with a delightful smile' and was idolised by his students.[25] He is credited with building up the cadets to an outstanding level of participation. Indeed, boys at the College could hardly have avoided the Cadet Corps, for their Vice Principal led by example: he was a Lieutenant in the Victorian Artillery and had been placed in command of the Second Battalion at the Cadet Encampment at Langwarrin, in 1900.

Drill had been part of the boys' routine since the 1860s and, with Gymnastics and Military Exercises, part of Victorian schools' curricula since the 1850s because of the benefits that were



The new Physics laboratory in 1906, showing the latest equipment that had been purchased from England

The championship Football Team of 1890: includes J. Glassford, W.Bell, A. Timms, R. Reid (Captain), D.C. Morrison, F. Guthrie, Mr Hall; R. Griffiths, J. Bell, H. Reid, J. Trebilcock, A.D. Kearney; W. Juce, R. McFarland; R. Gullaw, J. Hensley, R. Suter, E. Deane, S. Devlin, M.J. Kearney, T. Cowan, P. Miller, H. Grey and C. Sandford

perceived to accrue from such discipline. Rifle shooting developed as a popular school sport in Victoria in the 1870s, and so when Sir Frederick Sargood, the then Minister of Defence, established a committee of teachers from state, public and private schools to create a Volunteer Cadet Corps in Victoria, the move was widely welcomed. Run by the Defence Department, the Cadet Corps began in 1884 and consisted of three metropolitan battalions, five country battalions and one separate battalion for private and public schools. By 1885, there were 1,850 cadets enrolled in Victoria.[26] Of those, fifty were cadets from The Geelong College unit, which had only formed in that year. The strong benefits to school discipline were, by the end of the century, coupled with patriotic sentiment born of Australia's move towards Federation and its participation in the Boer War. Cadet numbers at the College soared from eighty in 1899 to 115 in 1901. The unit took part in a special parade held in Melbourne in 1899 to farewell troops from Victoria and Tasmania, en route to South Africa; among them was their own officer, Sergeant-Major Paul. Old Collegians enlisted and Vincent Kearns was the first to be killed, in 1901. Military activity in China was also widely reported at school in the early 1900s as the then Principal's famous brother, Old Collegian and journalist George Ernest 'Chinese' Morrison, was posted in Peking. In 1907, Norman Morrison declared: 'Military drill and rifle shooting are not regarded as mere embellishments, but as potent factors in the education of a boy, and it is the policy of the school to insist that every College boy must be trained in the drill and in the use of the rifle, and thus be qualified, should occasion arise, to take his part in the defence of the Empire'.[27] World War I would soon claim the lives of many of these young cadets.

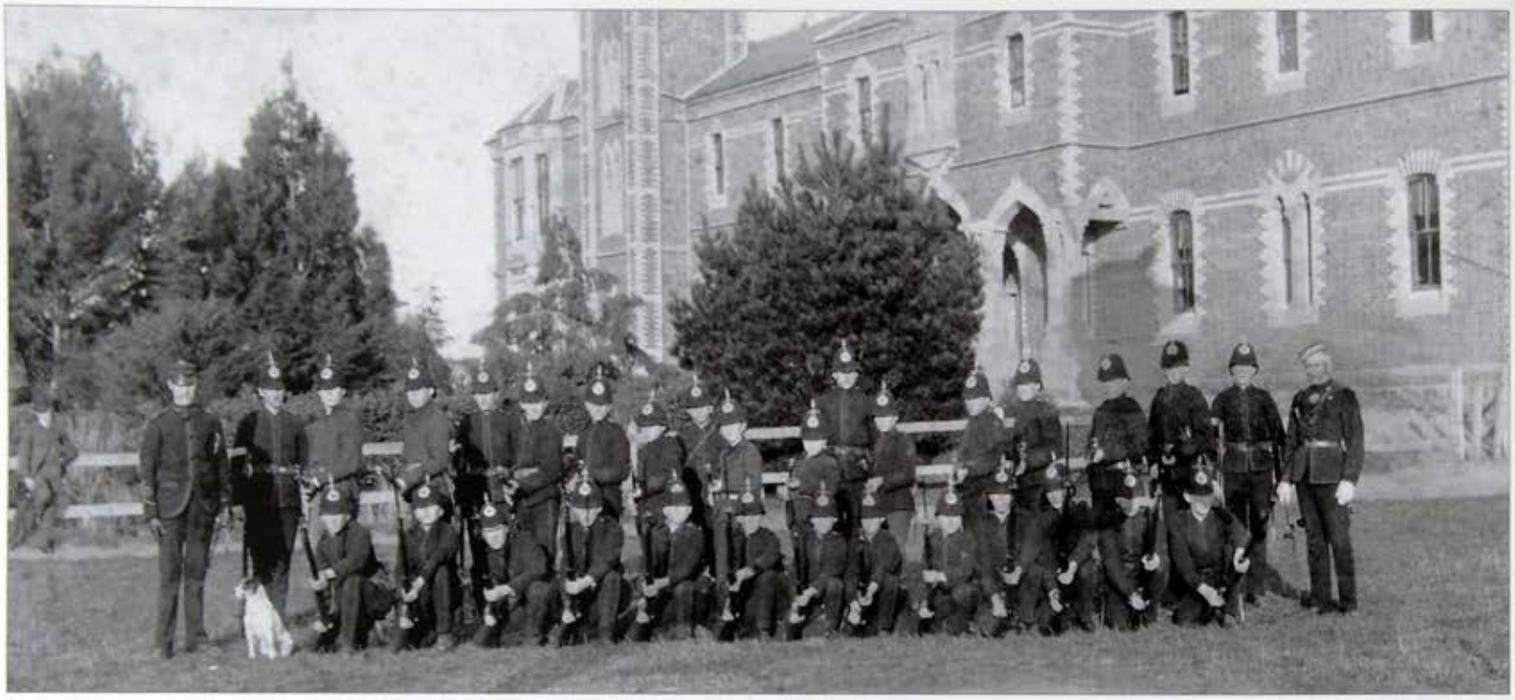
The Geelong College Cadet Corps Officers and NCOs, 1896. Captain Norman Morrison is easily identifiable in his dark uniform in the back row.
Back row: Lieut. G. McPherson, Drummer S. Reid, Capt. Morrison, Sgt S. Warby, Sgt S. Robertson, Sgt E. Greeves, Sgt F. Mc Farland, Lieut. D.C. Braham;
Seated: L-Corp. A.C. Stock, Corp. A.E. Dear, Corp. A.C. Whiting, Lieut J. McRae, Sgt-Bugler H. Young, L-Corp. W. Robertson, L-Corp. C. Wilmott;
Front: L-Corp. C. Dennis, L-Corp. S. Roebuck

Norman Morrison also enthusiastically supported the development of rowing. Tentative beginnings in 1877 gradually led to the purchase of four boats in 1888 and in 1889 the year-old College Boat Club built its own boat shed on the banks of the Barwon River, thanks to the generosity of Old Collegians. The boats were regularly used on the river and at Lake Connewarre for weekend picnics, outings and camping trips, and mostly by boarders:

> the various crews leave the school at daylight, sometimes earlier, and … carry their provisions and cooking utensils with them, and thus enjoy their meals in the open air. The day is spent in bathing, nesting, and other amusements, and at nightfall a start is made for home. The arrival of each successive party at the school with some fresh incident to relate, or trophy to display, lends a pleasant interest to the Saturday evenings. The good derived from these outings cannot be exaggerated: not only do the boys become good watermen and expert campers, but they learn self-reliance and handiness, and acquire a liking for out-door life and fresh air that is of the utmost value.[18]

By 1906, the Boat Club boasted over one hundred members, including almost all the boarders, and fifteen boats. From 1901, some crews were coached in racing by teacher L. Austin (1901–14), and occasionally raced against other schools such as Wesley College and Geelong Grammar. Annual participation in the Head of the River commenced in 1908 when the College became a member of the Associated Public Schools (APS).

Did the College suffer at all from the economically difficult period in the early 1890s? Most schools in Victoria did, and certainly Geelong Grammar, its nearest rival, lost many boys – in



The Cadet Unit in 1886, the year following its formation. Note the spiked helmets

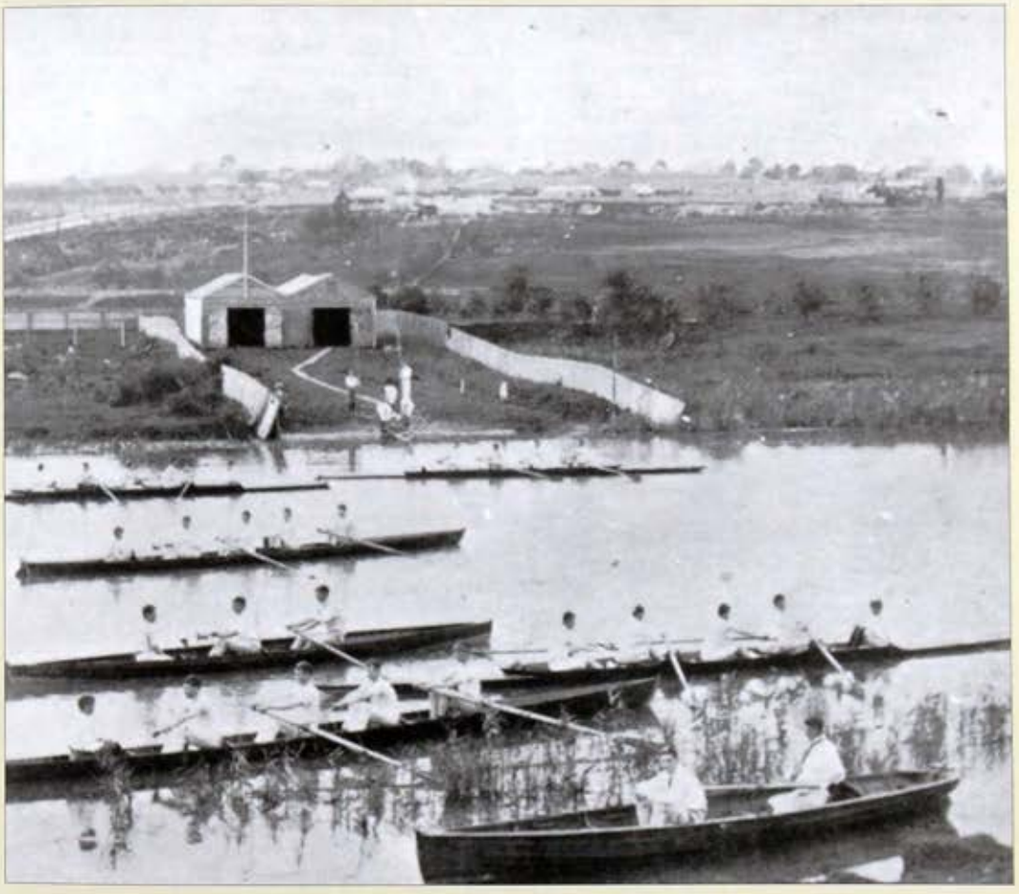
particular, boarders. Other prominent schools, such as Melbourne Grammar, were brought to the brink of closure; many smaller, private schools did close. The number of new boarders at the College declined only temporarily during 1894, 1895 and 1896, and rose again from 1897. It seems to have emerged from this difficult economic period remarkably unscathed. During the late 1890s, the clientele of the College also began to change to reflect a growth in enrolments from regional Victoria. During the 1880s, numbers of boarders from Melbourne had increased, a mark of boom time wealth, but dropped off during the 1890s depression. Instead, the number of new students enrolled from regional Victoria increased and by the end of the 1890s accounted for more new enrolments (around 50 per cent) than from Geelong (now 40 per cent, compared with a consistent 50 per cent enrolment up to this time). The largest growth in enrolments from wealthy pastoral families came much later, however, from the mid-1920s.

A mark of forward thinking came in 1891 with the formal establishment of a Junior School under a separate Master-in-Charge, which accepted young students until they were ready for secondary school work. The College had always had younger students at the school, but the division was a natural one to make as the school grew. It served not only as a feeder school and to expand enrolments, but provided great continuity for teachers and students, who had been trained in the same educational mould; and undoubtedly the College had watched with interest as Scotch College established its own separate Preparatory School in 1879. Thomas Brown, with qualifications from the University of Glasgow, was selected as the Master-in-Charge of the Junior School at The Geelong College, and appears to have been most successful in this role. Norman Morrison wrote in 1901 that 'the Junior College is a prosperous and eminently useful complement to the School. Boys are admitted between the ages of eight and twelve, the object of the Junior School being to secure a continuity of method from the early stages to the close of a boy's career.'[29]

The Geelong College was apparently in fine health when, after thirty-six years as Principal, Dr Morrison died suddenly, soon after excusing himself from teaching a class, on 15 February

Above: The earliest photo of College rowing. Initiatory Committee Boat Club, 1888. H. Waugh, H. Bell, C. Addiscott (Hon. Sec.) in the rear boat; I. Glassford, R. Reid, F. Holloway, A. Kearney, ? in the front boat

Below: The College boat sheds on the Barwon River, c1908



The Head of the River, 1911, on Belmont Common

1898. Two days later, his long funeral cortege, winding from the school to the Geelong Cemetery, included current and former students on foot, 'many of whom were recognised as leading members of the bar and other professional pursuits', and at least seventy vehicles.[30] Dr Morrison's wife, Rebecca, was now the legal owner of the College, but his will included a special clause that allowed his son Norman to lease the school at a fair price, and so step into his father's shoes as Principal. The will also gave Norman Morrison an option to purchase the school, subject to the agreement of Dr Morrison's trustees, but this would never eventuate.[31]

After Dr Morrison's death, Norman Morrison announced that his intention, as Principal, would be to continue the school 'on the lines which my father followed and no opportunity will be neglected to introduce what is most desirable in modern, educational methods'.[32] Perhaps because Norman Morrison was already a well-established teacher at the school or perhaps because he was a Morrison, but most unusually during the transition period between Principals, the school recorded continual enrolment growth. A new storey for boarders was added to the southern wing in 1900, and a new classroom built in the same year, and yet another in 1904. Another block of land was purchased in 1903 and was used to create a new oval in the following year. It was opened by Geelong's Mayor, Councillor Neil Campbell, also an Old Collegian:

> The boys have now at their school door an oval 210 yards by 140 yards – larger than the Geelong Oval – which is sown with couch grass, and for the whole area laid as level as a billiard table above a mile of soakage drains, which discharge into the public channel in Aphrasia street. Two cricket pitches are set within this space, and

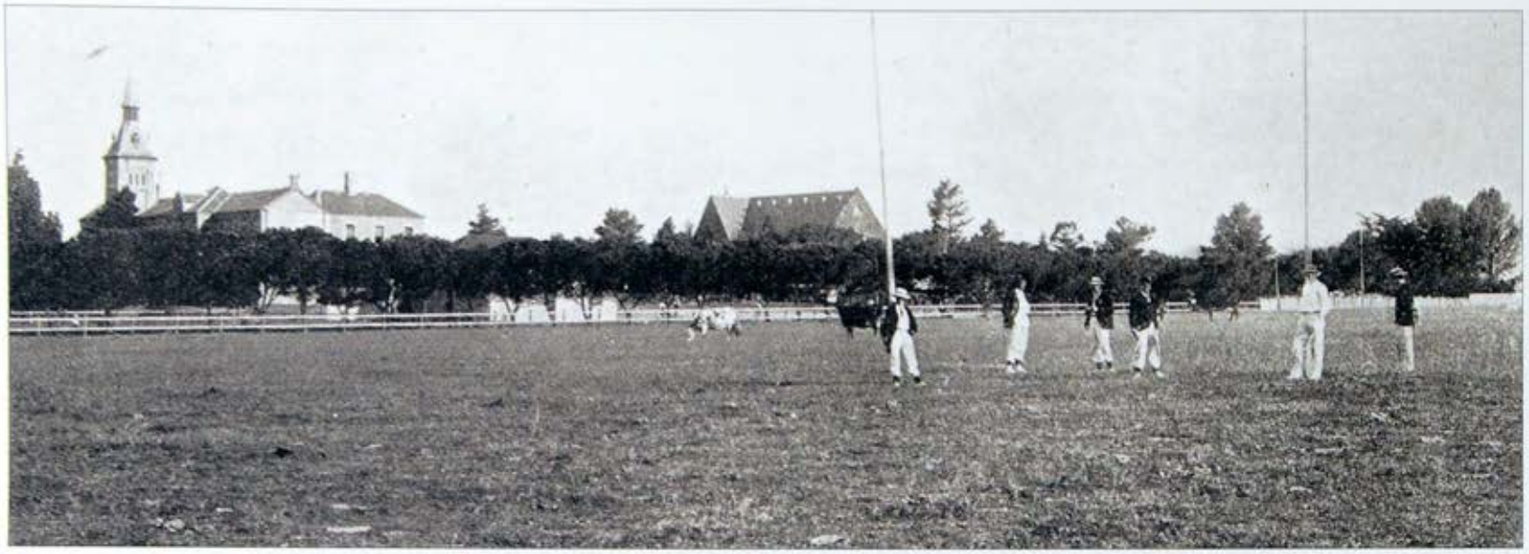
> on the western side a grove of trees has been planted, which in a few years will not only provide complete shelter from the wind, but will lend to the arena a picturesque aspect. The buffalo grass sown mound on the south side of the oval is surmounted by a tastefully designed pavilion. This building, which is after the Parisian style of architecture, embraces a grandstand, with seating accommodation for about 300 people; a storeroom; caterer's apartments; and dressing and bath rooms for the boys … Above the grand-stand is a look-out tower, the circular roof of which is supported by jarrah columns.[33]

The creation of these new sports facilities was, of course, an essential step to the College's becoming a member of the APS.

Because of these additions, from 1903 Norman Morrison was turning applicants away.[34] By 1907, the school had 189 students, including 84 boarders.[35] He had no choice but to continue to build. He was not constrained by a lack of land. New classrooms and modern new Science laboratories for Chemistry and Physics were built in 1905. The purchase of Warrinn in 1906 enabled the accommodation of more boarders. John Cameron (1906–17), an Honours graduate in Science from Cambridge, was appointed as the new Science Master. Change also came to other aspects of the curriculum: new teaching methods were adopted for French and Mathematics, the latter following the Mathematics Association's guidelines.[36] The changes to French were described as 'drastic', using a combination of the direct method and the phonetics method, under the supervision of Walter Price (1898–1919). Class singing was introduced in 1906. The Sloyd system of manual training – woodworking – popular in boys' schools, was also introduced by teacher J. Ashton, in 1907, with the aim: 'to train the boy's hand and eye, to make him observant, to make him exact … Apart from the purely educational value of Sloyd, there is the undoubted fact that a boy so trained can adapt himself with ease to any form of manual and mechanical work'.[37]

However, academic standards began to decline during Norman Morrison's era. This could not have passed unnoticed. Exhibition winners were now a rarity, with only one in the 1890s – John Donald McDonald in 1892 – compared to Scotch College's seventeen – and four in the 1900s compared to Scotch College's thirty.[38] Scotch College was, then, only twice the size of The Geelong College.

Norman Morrison (centre front) with the staff, 1908



The football grounds, c1908. Note the cows grazing on the oval

Dr Morrison's fine legacy to the College was commemorated by the opening of a memorial library in 1898, conceived and funded by his former students. This led to the establishment of the Old Geelong Collegians' Association (OGCA) in 1901. Its first President, Professor Kernot, expressed the great loyalty and pride of many Old Collegians:

> it was a matter for rejoicing that the spirit and traditions of early days which had first commended the institution were being to-day thoroughly maintained, and that the high standard in work, sports, and character set by the founder was being kept in every department by the present principal. Geelong College boys had made their mark in the history of the State, and were now to be found occupying many high positions of honour and trust.[39]

Many were members of the professions, especially doctors and lawyers. Some made their mark in politics: Councillor Neil Campbell was Mayor of Geelong; Sir Matthew Davies was a solicitor, member of parliament during the 1880s and 1890s and notorious land speculator who lost everything during the 1890s depression; Theodore Fink was famed for his leadership of the Royal Commission on Education; Thomas Armstrong became an Anglican Bishop; Reggie Morrison was a champion rugby player. For his part, Principal Norman Morrison publicly declared his hope that the OGCA would eventually be in charge of the school, 'and appoint the next headmaster when he ceased to be Principal. His firm conviction was that the school in the future would be carried on by the association.'[40] He reiterated this in a speech in 1907: 'Sooner or later the school would be merged into a corporate body of some kind, and in that he hoped that Old Collegians would play an important part. He asked them not to pay attention to what rumor said, for if there was anything to put forward at any time he would certainly consult the Old Collegians, and let them hear first hand from him.'[41]

Privately, however, Norman Morrison had already begun negotiations to sell the school to the Presbyterian Church. In this arrangement, the OGCA would merely have representation on a school council – a vastly different outcome to 'full control', which would be wielded by the Church. He sought valuations of the College as early as June 1906 and, with the agreement of his mother (to whom the College had belonged since Dr Morrison's death) and most of his family, aimed to sell by

the end of that year. All that remained for the sale to proceed was to gain approval from Norman's brother, George Ernest, in China, so that the family's decision would be unanimous.[42]

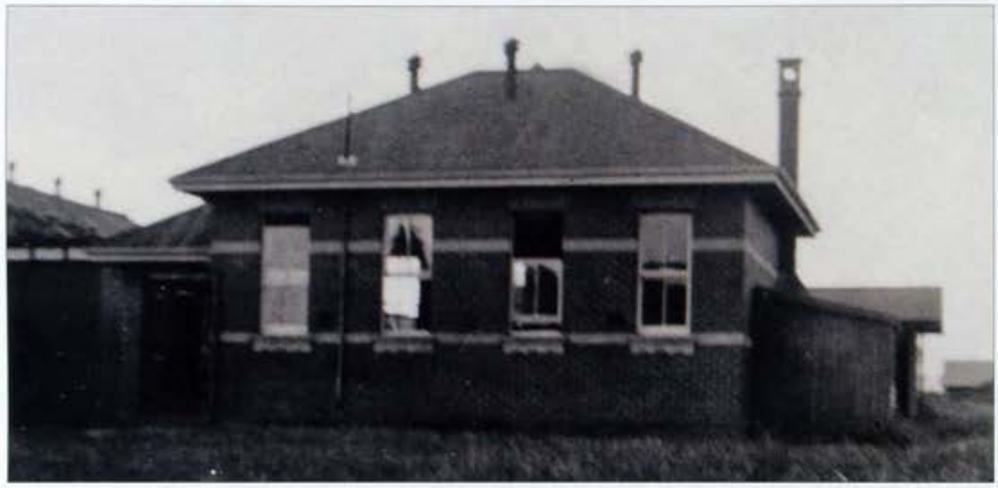
Norman Morrison wrote at length to his brother about the matter, outlining all the points in support of the scheme, stressing that the sale was the best way to assure the College's future, particularly given the introduction of state government secondary education.[43] The state registration of all schools and teachers had been on the public agenda since the 1890s, and was regarded suspiciously by many private and denominational schools. Victoria's educational world had been fraught with uncertainty since the introduction in 1905 of the *Schools' Registration Act*. Several smaller private schools closed; the rest were forced by the Act to submit to inspection by the Schools' Inspection and Examination Board, established by the University of Melbourne. New public examinations were introduced in 1905 and 1906, and between 1907 and 1910 state continuation schools and agricultural high schools were established. In 1910, a continuation school was established at the Gordon Institute in Geelong. Norman Morrison guessed that the next step would be the introduction of state high schools to end the private school monopoly on

The pavilion on its formal opening day in 1904

It was better to sell the school than be lumbered with a 'white elephant' later if the school's fortunes or economic times should worsen.

secondary education. He was correct – the Geelong High School opened in 1915. Small private schools had received bad press, many deservedly so. He mentioned in the letter to his brother the recent closure of one well-known private school, Cumloden, and contrasted this with the space and favour lavished on Public Schools in the press.[44]

Norman Morrison also tried to convince his brother that the family's acceptance of £13,000 for the College was highly recommended by him and his advisors, despite valuations ranging from £16,500 to £25,750, as he believed that the Church could not afford more, and that it was better to sell the school than be lumbered with a 'white elephant' later if the school's fortunes or economic times should worsen. Sir John Macfarland, Master of Ormond College, highly influential member of the University Council and the person in charge of the Presbyterian Church's finances, also wrote to encourage George Ernest Morrison's acceptance of the plan, especially the price, and assured him of the Church's wish to 'do our part in Victoria'.[45] However, 'Chinese' Morrison did not give his consent, as had other members of the family. We don't know why – perhaps he supported the sale in principle, but not the price. When the sale did go ahead, one year later, it is unknown whether or not this was with or without his consent.



Above: The College's Chemistry laboratory, c1924

Below: Warrinn, c1924

The acquisition of the College was approved by the Presbyterian Church of Victoria in November 1907. Fittingly, it was William Littlejohn, Principal of Scotch College (1904–33), who proposed the motion to do so.[46] Representatives of the Presbyterian Church met with three representatives of the OGCA – Professor Kernot, Mr Leon and Dr McArthur – and with Old Collegian representation assured on the new Council, the school's new constitution was announced on 7 February 1908. The Presbyterian Church appointed Norman Morrison as the Principal on the same day. The College reverted to Presbyterian Church ownership and automatically became one of the six Associated Public Schools of Victoria. Norman Morrison carefully explained the reasons: 'The chief reason for this important step was the widely-felt desire that the College, which was the creation and the life-work, and remains the monument of the late Dr George Morrison, should live for all time, and be permanently removed from all danger of those vicissitudes which are sometimes associated with private ownership'.[47] That Norman Morrison was able, most astutely, to ensure the College's survival as well as lifting it above the level of a privately run school and into the APS must have been a dream come true. The future of the College seemed assured. No one could have anticipated that 1909 would end in tragedy, nor how difficult the next decade would be.

Sloyd class, 1906