

High ideals

The College Council deliberately chose a Presbyterian Church minister as the next Principal to create a more religious school culture, signify change and remind both the school community and the general public that the College was, to outward appearances at least, a Church school. The appointment of the Reverend Francis Rolland (1920–45) was one of the most significant Council decisions ever made. He surpassed Council's expectations and would become the most influential Principal since Dr George Morrison, and one of the most important principals in the history of the College.

The Reverend Rolland was first and foremost a clergyman, but he was always known as 'Mr Rolland' to the boys. Born in 1878, the son of a Presbyterian minister, it must have seemed providential that his grandfather, the Reverend Alexander Campbell, had been so closely connected with the foundation of the College. Mr Rolland's education took him from Toorak College to Scotch College, then Ormond College for his Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Arts. After Divinity studies in Edinburgh and a stint as assistant minister at Scots Church in Melbourne, he went as a missionary to the remote desert in northern South Australia, at the Smith of Dunesk Mission. With John Flynn in 1912, he established the Australian Inland Mission. His next calling was as chaplain with the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) (1915–19), serving with distinction and great courage, especially in France, and being rewarded with the Military Cross. These remarkable achievements afforded him hero status when he arrived at the College in 1920, still relatively fresh from battle and with his new wife, Aline.¹

The new emphasis on religious tone at the College, personified by the school's first clergyman Principal, was reinforced immediately by the appointment of the Minister of St George's, the Reverend J.B. Rentoul, as school Chaplain (1920–31). Daily Assembly, led by the Principal, was focused on worship – a prayer, hymn and Bible reading. Mr Rolland wrote prayers for these Assemblies, making them brief yet thoughtfully relevant to school life, and accessible to boys and young men. Values of fair play, hard work and loyalty dominated his speeches at Assemblies and on other occasions. Religious piety was not emphasised at every turn, unless it could be strongly linked to other aspects of educational purpose, or to underline that the whole College was, in a sense, a 'chapel'.



Rev F. W. Rolland front right. He is shown here with staff and Council members at the official unveiling of the War Memorial Honour tablets on 9 June 1922. Back row: J. D'Helin, Rev. E.M. Baird, A.H. MacRoberts, A.H. Harry, Dr A.N. McArthur; Third row: A.D.C. to Governor, ?; Second row: Alderman Hitchcock, R.K. Gillespie, S.B. Calvert, Mr Justice McArthur; Front row: Lord Stradbroke, Rev. Jas Forrest, Rev. F.H.L. Paton, Rev. F.W. Rolland

Although he had never been a schoolteacher or a Headmaster, Mr Rolland's graceful wisdom, war service and background as a minister meant that he attracted new families to the school like a magnet. 'He had a saintly aura, a delightful sense of humour, and cast a spell over boys. He could handle little boys as well as deal with young men of 17 and 18', recalls Old Collegian Ken Nall (1930-42).² Geoff Neilson (1935-47) agrees: 'I thought of him not as "Sir" Francis Rolland but as "Saint" Francis Rolland. He was a tall saintly looking figure with a quiet voice. Nobody did anything to annoy him because he was greatly loved and admired.'³ He had a 'whimsical' turn of phrase, recalls Old Collegian Fred Elliott (1946) and was very much part of the life of the boarding house, too: 'He would visit the junior boarders on Saturday evenings. He would come in through the study door and we would play games with him, and he would read to us and tell us stories.'⁴

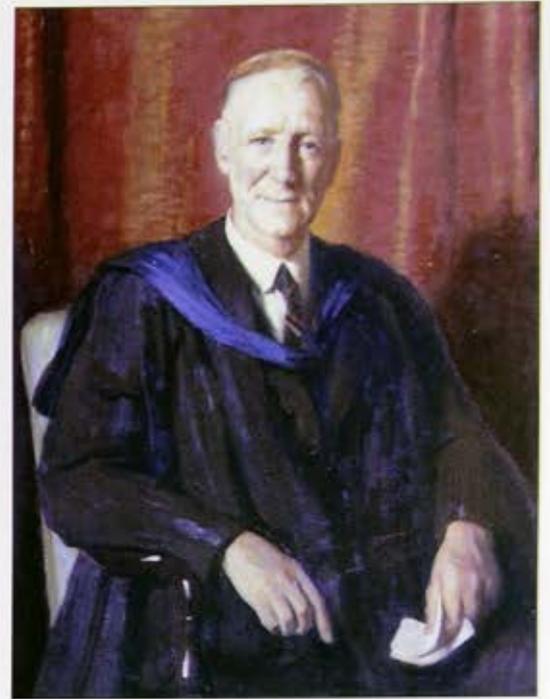
Enrolments grew rapidly under Mr Rolland's leadership and the school more than doubled in size, from 207 when he began in 1920 to 508 in 1945. Accordingly, new buildings were needed and so the College entered a period of renewal. Sleeping-out quarters for extra boarders were hastily added in 1920, and by 1923 two additional sleep-outs had been added to Warrinn. New classrooms were desperately needed and so the idea of a separate Preparatory School block became reality when land in Claremont Avenue was purchased late in 1920. The Preparatory School was funded with assistance from the Presbyterian Church and other donations. At the laying of the foundation stone in 1920, the Reverend D.A. McKenzie, Chairman of the Presbyterian Church Board of Education, expressed Presbyterian support for education in Geelong, and encouraged the College to continue its good work, saying that it had 'justified its existence', and that the College's boys should 'practise the spirit of self-sacrifice and faith if they were to realise the opportunities' available to them.⁵ When Sir John Macfarland opened the new Preparatory School buildings in 1921, he echoed the sentiments of Presbyterian Church support for education in Geelong within the context of a diverse system of education in Victoria, both state and denominational. Sir John also emphasised the importance of good preparatory schooling, describing it as the most important work of the school, needing teachers of 'originality, vivacity and strength'.⁶

Ken Nicholson was the first Preparatory School Head (1921–27). Day boy enrolments soared throughout the school, but particularly at the Preparatory School, to a total of 193 by 1924. Until then, the College had little competition; Geelong Grammar did not open its own preparatory school until 1924. Mr Rolland was clearly delighted with the success of the new Preparatory School and its influence on the moral tone of the College. He was also pleased that more and more parents were recognising the need for such a development:

Parents are beginning to lose the old idea that children need less skilful teaching when they are young, and to recognise that in the years between 6 and 13 a boy's sense of right and wrong is being formed, his attitude to learning being determined, and his constitution being built up or damaged. They are therefore demanding the most sympathetic teaching for boys of that age, and the healthiest environment for study in the way of airy classrooms and ample playing fields. Our Preparatory School is an answer to that demand ...⁷

The Preparatory School's expansion caused a number of school events to be reorganised. The first separate Junior Athletics meeting was held in 1924 because there were just too many students to hold one event. When Old Collegian John (always known as 'J.H.') Campbell (1912) was appointed to take over as the Head of the Preparatory School in 1928, there were enough enrolments to consider the establishment of a separate Kindergarten, to cater for the 4- to 7-year-olds. Miss Sylvia Baird was in charge of the first group, with the original plan of having a separate building for this section of the school. 'Until someone presents us with a kindergarten building and grounds', lamented Mr Rolland, other arrangements would have to be made: 'the next best thing we can do is to lessen the gap between the youngest and the oldest in the Preparatory School, by reducing the age at which boys pass on to the Senior School'.⁸

Leslie (always known as 'L.J.') Campbell took over as Head of the Preparatory School in 1931 and remained in the position for more than three decades. He taught Latin and



The Reverend Frank Rolland



The school 'rowing bus'. Students travelling to the boatshed courtesy of the school horse, 'Colonel', c1921

arithmetic, and a stern demeanour earned him the nickname 'Frosty'. Old Collegian Don Lawler (1949) remembers how L.J. Campbell often said: 'I don't want to hear what is in your text book. The knowledge of the world is in books. I want to know what is in your head.'⁹ The Preparatory School continued to develop its own identity when, in 1933, the first separate Speech Night was held. A person important to the Preparatory School's ongoing success was the beloved Reverend Ewen McLean (1940–53), who taught several subjects, as well as infusing the school with a graceful religious tone long before he became chaplain at the Senior School in 1954. He was a supreme example of Mr Rolland's desire to find masters 'who teach not for a living but by a life of infectious enthusiasm, and courage, and gaiety of spirit'.¹⁰

As well as launching physical expansion, such as the Preparatory School, Mr Rolland was keen from the outset to open students' minds to the world beyond College boundaries, and to encourage opportunities and experiences that naturally provided moral training and skills for life. He did not shirk the need to improve academic rigour but understood that College life needed a better balance between academic, sport and extracurricular pursuits. Some of his earliest innovations indicate his acute awareness of the College's clientele. The

rise in boarding numbers from the Western District and the Riverina was due in part to the general growth in Victoria's population, but also to widespread economic confidence that replaced the immediate effects of the drought and wartime conditions. We see this assurance reflected, increasingly, in enrolment records, where a significant number of boys from Colac and Camperdown, for example, enrolled in the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. From 1909 to 1935, around half of the new enrolments almost every year were boarders.¹¹

To cater for the increased number of boarders from rural Victoria who returned to 'the land' after leaving school, Mr Rolland added an Agricultural Science course to the curriculum in 1920. It was specifically advertised in the country press, especially *The Pastoralists' Review*, and the prospectus was updated to emphasise that an agricultural stream had been added 'for boys who intend to go on the land'.¹² Initially for Form 6 boys and extended to the three senior classes in 1921, it was taught by Mr Crichton, a

Sir John MacFarland accepting the key of the Preparatory School from Eliot Hungerford Chapman in 1921. Charles Shannon can be seen to the left of the photograph and behind him, Stanley Hamilton-Calvert





Above: The Preparatory School students gathered outside their new school classrooms in 1921



Below: L.J. Campbell with the Preparatory School Prefects, 1948

Master with an Agricultural Science degree as well as practical farming experience. The new course consisted of seven main subjects: the soil, fertilisers, irrigation, stock, crops, farm products and surveying. Arrangements were made for students to visit the State Research Farm in Werribee, and a one-acre plot was set aside at the College to give students practical experience.¹³ By the following year, this plot included a crop of barley sowed with superphosphate, and forty small beds set aside to study wheat grown with artificial manures. There was 'great rivalry' between the vegetable growers, but little rain to get results.¹⁴

One of Mr Rolland's most visionary innovations was the College Endowment Fund, established in 1924. It outstripped expectations when it attracted large donations and long-term pledges of loyalty through the continued enrolment of sons of Old Collegians. The fund, which aimed to raise £12,000, was devoted to reducing College debt, as well as planning for new buildings. Mr Rolland had first raised the idea in 1920, when he asked for more classrooms and boarding accommodation, as well as a hospital for the isolation of sick boarders. The hospital was built immediately – the College had just weathered the effects of the influenza epidemic and the need was obvious. Early in 1924, Mr Rolland insisted on the establishment of the Endowment Fund. In fact, the issue had nearly caused his resignation, so staunchly opposed to the idea of an appeal was the Council's Treasurer. The Church Finance Board, however, refused to give any more money to the College until there was some reduction of the growing debt, and to Mr Rolland's mind there was no alternative but to hold an appeal: 'I finally decided to make the Council choose between him [the Treasurer] and my resignation and it was agreed to ask the Old Collegians for £12,000. £20,000 was raised and then the depression began. We were just in time.'¹⁵

The College Council appointed the Reverend Rentoul to lead the campaign, and the Presbyterian Church demonstrated its support by relieving him of his Church duties for a term to work solely on the College Endowment Fund. Furnished with lists of Old Collegians, and with the inexhaustible help of Council Chairman Stanley Hamilton-Calvert and a sub-committee of Old Collegians formed especially for the task, the Reverend Rentoul visited Old Collegians in the Western District, Riverina, Wimmera, Mallee, Sydney and Melbourne. Old Collegians interstate and in Great Britain were also approached by post, and by early in 1925, the fund stood at more than £25,000. 'Quite apart from the value in money gained by this campaign', declared the organising committee, 'great good will result from the visitation of all these Collegians, who have demonstrated their great loyalty for the Old School, and expressed their intention to continue to support it by sending their sons, many of whom will reach the School age within the next few years'.¹⁶

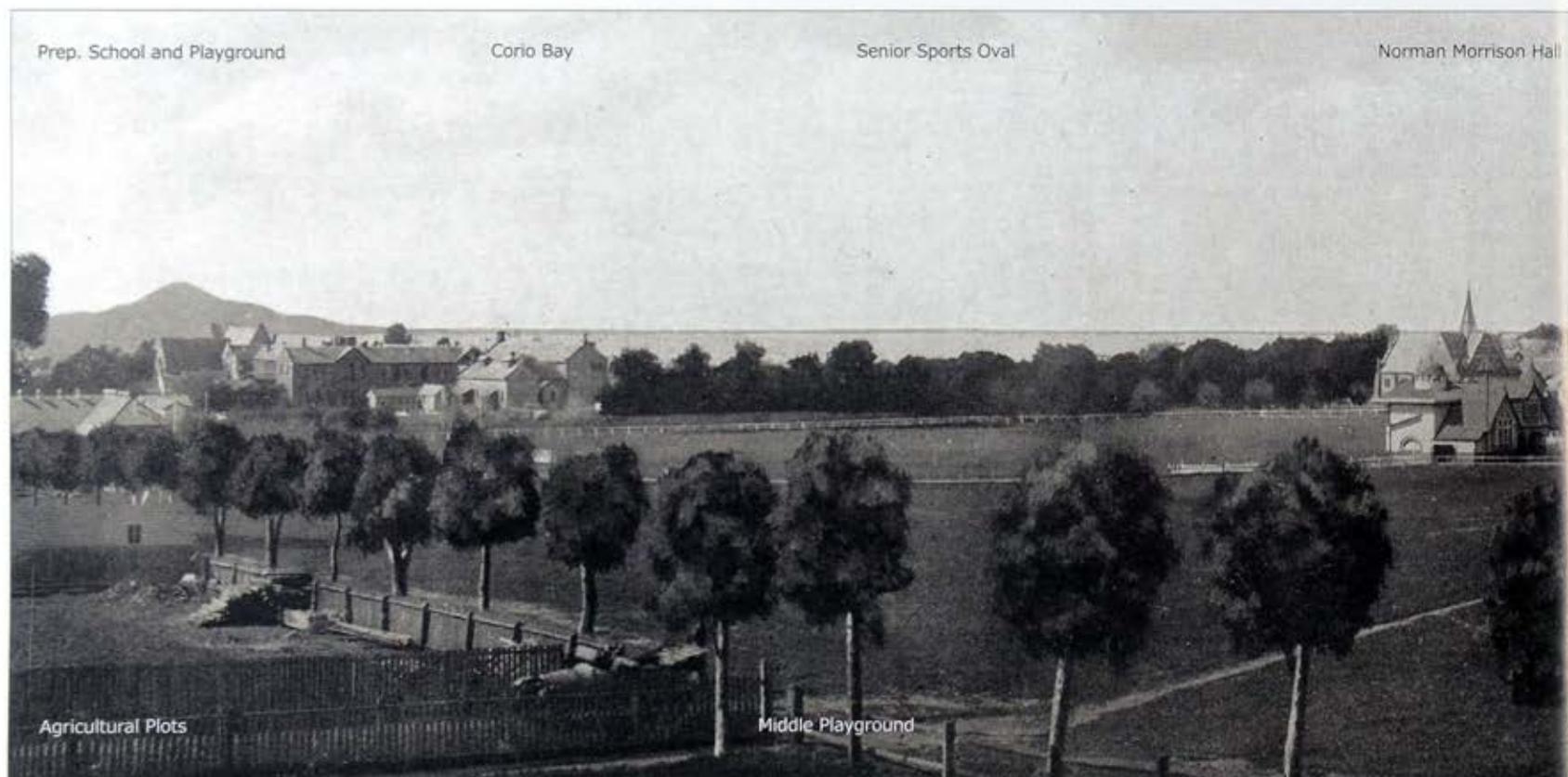
The Funston family was one who received visits from people in the network of Old Collegians. Neil Funston, a boarder in the 1930s from the Western District, became familiar with the exploits of the school Football Team, during radio broadcasts of public school football matches: 'I would linger down at the local grocer's store – where the wireless was always tuned to the event – before proceeding home. My parents would also attend as many of the football matches and rowing meets as they could manage. This interest in the College was maintained by visits from Mr Stanley [Hamilton-] Calvert'. Furthermore, Neil looked forward to joining his brother as a boarder: 'When my entry date was finally fixed, I drew up a chart and hung it on the wall near my bed, marking off each day which was bringing me closer to enrolment'.¹⁷



Ewen McLean, 1947

Previously housed at Warrinn from 1932, the youngest boarders were placed in the hospital; those in Junior House were looked after by Matron Ruby Fraser. Later called Rolland House, Junior House had a homely feel, and Matron Fraser followed with interest the progress of her students as they progressed from Dorm One 'to Dorm Two, then Three and Four and eventually on to Mackie House, long trousers and the Sunday horror of starched white shirt collars and studs. She took particular interest if they were good at football or eventually graduated to her beloved Geelong Cats team.'¹⁸ Weekly pocket money, allocated by the Reverend McLean in the 1940s, was threepence for each boarder in Junior House. The 'best buy' was a tin of sweetened condensed milk, purchased from Sammy Loffel's store near the school. Junior House also had a well-stocked library of boys' adventure stories, including tales of Biggles, Beau Geste and Dr Fu Manchu.¹⁹ Mackie House, run firmly by John Carrington from 1940, was a cold and unhappy contrast to Junior House. 'It was very strict. Boys weren't, for example, allowed to walk up the passage in case they might upset Mr Tait [the Vice Principal], who had a room nearby. It never felt like home.'²⁰ Warrinn, in contrast, was run by J.H. Campbell and, although run-down, was homey. Boys loved and respected 'J.H.', who was 'very much the Mr Chips of the College. At night in his study, boys sat around everywhere, reading his books, listening to the wireless, talking to him, enjoying the fire in winter', recalls Fred Elliott.²¹ Boarders looked forward to the big Saturday expedition (most weeks during the warmer weather) to Devil's Pool in the Barwon River, where boys swam, played, rock-hopped and picnicked under the supervision of the Reverend McLean. This is where many boarders learned to swim.²²

Mr Rolland insisted, in 1937, that the long-overdue extra boarding house be built and, assertively, suggested that this had to be done if Council wanted him to remain as Principal.

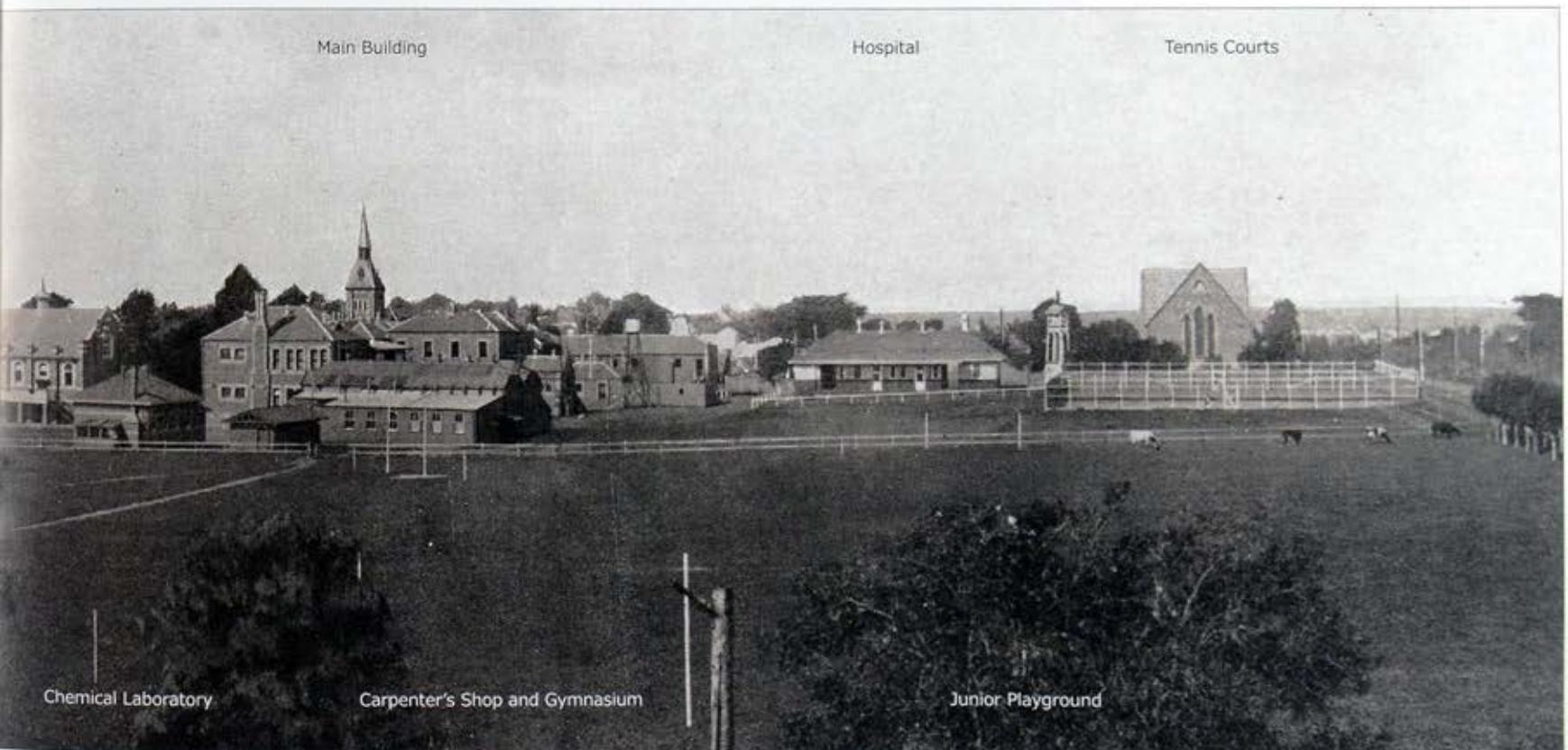


Mr Rolland insisted, in 1937, that the long-overdue extra boarding house be built and, assertively, suggested that this had to be done if Council wanted him to remain as Principal:

Our action will determine ... whether or not we have the driving force as a Council to carry out the task to which we have set our hands, or whether we should ask others to take our places and let them carry further what we have already carried far. Personally I should be thankful to hand over to a younger man the next big advance and as you know it was my wish to do so at the end of this year ... I refuse to let the school halt or retreat until it achieves the 'quantity' and above all the quality which is its goal ... Many schools do overcrowd but such action is reprehensible, and will not be allowed at the College. Warrinn House is very old and cannot last for ever. At present though popular with the boys – it sometimes suffers in parents' eyes by comparison with the other Houses, and two thirds of our new boys go into residence there. The cost of repairs to Warrinn is now heavy.¹¹

The school was most fortunate to receive a bequest of £10,000 from the Helen Mackie Estate in 1937, which was put towards the new boarding house, and so named Mackie House when it opened in 1939. Although long overdue, this helped to fulfil part of Mr Rolland's Master Plan of 1927, to be able to accept a total of 190 boarders. No sooner had Mackie House opened, however, than boarding reached capacity, with a total of 203 boarders across the whole school. Mr Rolland urged Council to build more accommodation, and in 1940 proposed an entirely new Preparatory School and boarding house on a new site as the only way forward. By then, with boarders numbering 220, the College was first and foremost a boarding school, rivalled only by Geelong Grammar. It would take another twenty years, however, for a new Preparatory School to come to being at the College.

Panorama of the school as it was in the 1920s-30s, prior to the building of Mackie House. The agricultural plots can be seen to the left





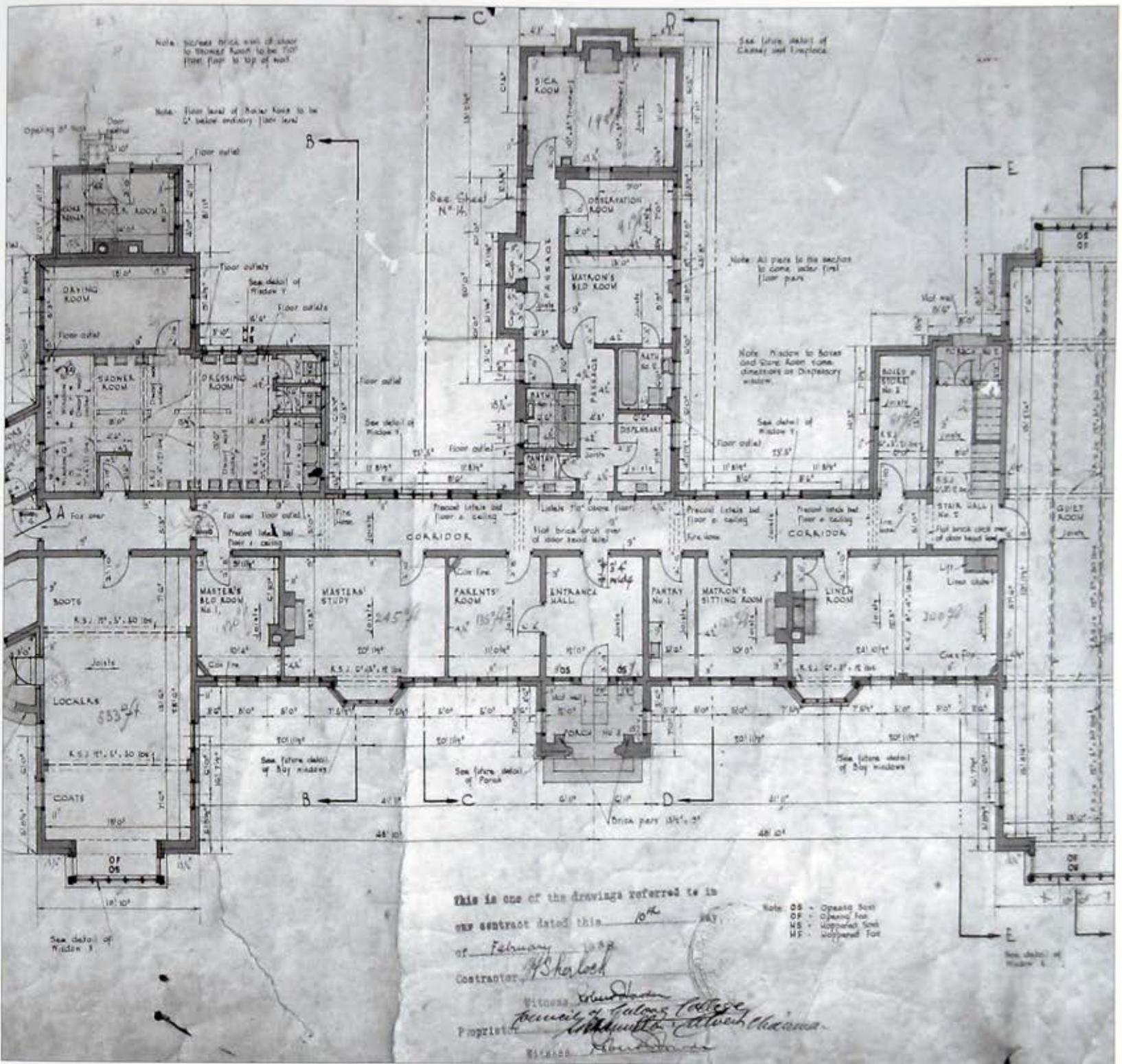
The hospital, c1927. All Saints Church and its belltower can be seen in the background



Left: School nurses, 1921. Photo: George Victor Shultz Album



Right: John Carrington off to work, with Don Walpole looking innocent. It took many mornings of waiting patiently before this photo was able to be taken as 'Carro' was very camera shy. Photo: John Gordon Waugh Album



Extract from architectural plans for the ground floor of the new Mackie House, February 1938



Boys lined up for the laying of the foundation stone for the new dining hall, c1929

The origins of the new Mackie boarding house had formed part of the College's first Master Plan in 1927. The Principal led discussions about the prudence of buying more land nearby, or moving to a larger site, neither of which could be decided until there was some agreement about the optimal size of the school. A decision was essential for him to 'carry on his work enthusiastically', and so he gave the Council three options: to remain unchanged but discourage the enrolment of more boarders; to sell the property and build a new school to accommodate 700; or to plan for a Senior School on the present site of 350 boys and eventually a separate and new Junior School on land elsewhere for 150 boys. Mr Rolland wanted to move the whole school but the Old Geelong Collegians' Association opposed the idea, so 'with very great reluctance I was compelled to put more buildings down on the present site'.²⁴ The third option was developed into a Master Plan, the first stage of which commenced immediately, to build a new dining hall and kitchen, and new domestic quarters, both of which would free up space to be used as a second boarding house.

Refectory building construction, c1929



Mr Rolland encouraged all members of Council to find new enrolments by drawing on their extensive personal networks and influence.

This would enable enrolment of a further seventy boarders and 110 day boys and increase the school to 350 – a size preferred by Mr Rolland – and surpassed in 1941.²⁵

Council wavered in its resolve in June that year when serious consideration was given to the purchase of a 300-acre site on Bell Post Hill for a completely new school to be built. The College was given first option to purchase it, but after much discussion decided to keep to the original plan.²⁶ Donations were solicited, especially from Old Collegians who had not previously given to the Endowment Fund. By mid-1928, one-third of the cost of the new dining hall and domestic block had been raised. Building began in 1929 and the grand English-collegiate style, wood-panelled dining hall was ready in 1930.

As the economy slid into depression, further building plans were postponed. Two housemaids and one teacher were dismissed. When enrolments began to decline, the College decided that 'a generous attitude should be adopted towards parents temporarily embarrassed by the economic depression in so far as this could be done without undue financial loss to the school'.²⁷ From 1932, a 10 per cent reduction in boarding fees was allowed to families with more than one boy at the College, and to families with one boarder at Morongo Girls' College and one at the College. By 1933, the Boyd Scholarship Fund was assisting fifty boys each year to stay on at school, thanks to the generous bequest of Old Collegian James Boyd. The investment of the principal sum, more than £23,000, considerably relieved financial pressure for the College. As early as 1930 the Chairman of Council began to write personal letters to old Collegians in districts all over Victoria to encourage them to enrol their sons at the College. Similarly, Mr Rolland encouraged all members of Council to find new enrolments by drawing on their extensive personal networks and influence.²⁸ Although enrolments dipped to 242 in 1934, these strategies avoided a more dire outcome from the impact of the Great Depression.

Mr Rolland spoke forcefully and eloquently at Speech Nights about the College's deserving place in the town of Geelong as a most important educational institution, especially in difficult economic times, and knew that his speech would be published in full in the *Geelong Advertiser*, as it was in *Pegasus*, and so read by thousands of people:

Eleven per cent of our day boys, to say nothing of boarders, have entirely free education through endowed scholarships. Every one of these scholarships is given to a Geelong boy; not one has been endowed by a Geelong man. That fact alone makes plain how greatly we have failed to make Geelong citizens realise the debt the city owes to the school.²⁹

He reminded the public of the generosity to Geelong's small boys through Preparatory School fees that were far lower than any Melbourne APS counterpart. 'If you can afford to help the school to do more and better things for the boys of this city', Mr Rolland continued, 'do not hesitate to offer your co-operation, whatever form it may take, from the gift of a tree to the gift of a chapel'.³⁰

He continued to rally support for the school, suggesting, a few years later, the establishment of a Friends of Geelong College Society, and that interested members should be kept in touch with the activities of the school by receiving *Pegasus*. This, again, was somewhat innovative, when other schools were forming Parents' Associations rather than groups with broader membership. Mr Rolland was keenly aware of the need to foster broad-based support for the College. There seems little doubt that he had widespread parental



support, which was translating into enrolments. In their eyes, he imbued the students with the high ideals expected of Presbyterian gentlemen through moral and religious training, and fostered 'in our boys the spirit of service and self-control, the spirit that makes men worthy of freedom, the spirit that comes from putting themselves in the second place'.³¹ It was wise counsel for the coming dark days of World War II.

First Preparatory dramatic entertainment *Cinderella*, 1921



25 mm
BRADS

STAPLES FOR
JAMBRO STAPLER