



Ian Macmillan (Head of Preparatory School 1977-1986):

# Pioneer, Leader and a Breath of Fresh Air

MIKE HOWELL, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY RELATIONS

A boarder, a rower, a teacher, a revolutionary head of school and a psychologist. Ian Macmillan's life has taken him around the world, and back again.

In Ian 'Doc' Macmillan's day, The Geelong College 1st VIII rowers had the reputation of being fast finishing.

Ian recalls many fond memories of his time at College, both as a Mackie boarder, and a keen rower. But as is the case with any sportsman, he still remembers 'the one that got away.

On a sunny day in April 1952, the annual rowing regatta, Head of the River was underway. Rowers from all of the APS schools were vying for the title, and College was no exception.

Ian was rowing in the position of 'stroke', and The Geelong College was

in third place, with Scotch College in first and Geelong Grammar in second - a length-and-a-half ahead.

Jim Howden, in 6 seat, saw their chance, shouting words of encouragement as the crew blazed toward the finish line.

"Come on Doc, let's go!"

Ian and the other boys rowed with all their might, powering ahead of Grammar. But victory was not to be theirs, and Scotch crossed the finish line in first place.

Shaking his head at the memory, Ian smiles.

"Another 10 strokes and we would have won!" he says.

Nevertheless, their coach was impressed, describing them as 'one of the fittest crews to ever row on the Barwon'.

High praise, indeed, given their coach was none other than rowing great, Albert Bell.

Ian was much more than a rower, was involved in almost every aspect of school life - from sport to cadets and performing arts.

He achieved many honours, colours and caps over the years, having



*The 1952 1st VIII (Ian Macmillan second from front in stroke seat)*

been part of the 1st VIII rowing crew, Swimming, Athletics Team and 1st XVIII football team.

He was Captain of the Athletics team in 1953-1954, as well as Prefect 1953-1954 and Morrison House Captain in 1954.

He also turned his hand to acting, participating in multiple Glee Club productions and playing the role of Dick Deadeye in the 1954 production of 'HMS Pinafore'.



*Ian as King Hildebrand in the College production of Princess Ida*

With his family in Mildura, Ian was a full-time boarder at Mackie.

"Nearly all the boys were from farms in the Western District.

"I made a lot of very good friends at Mackie," he said

The was fortunate, as the distance between Geelong and Mildura made visits home difficult.

"During long weekends or holidays, I spent time with friends' families. I travelled to many interesting places around Victoria, like Stuart MacArthur's family home, 'Meningoort', in Camperdown."

Ian's school experience reads like 'A History of Geelong College'. As well as being coached by Albert Bell, he enjoyed being taught Music by George Logie Smith and History by JH Campbell.

When his time at College came to a close, Ian felt a little lost.

"I felt that nobody gave help or advice as to what to do after school. It was just assumed you would go to university," he said.

So that's exactly what Ian did.

He started studying law at Melbourne University, then switched to Commerce, which he finished off part-time.

With a degree under his belt, he fell into a number of roles through family connections. First, an accounting job with BHP, followed by an administration role at ANA, then to Mobil.

Whilst he appreciated the experience his early years in the workforce had given him, a career in finance left Ian feeling unfulfilled.

He decided that a career change was what was needed, and approached then College Principal, Dr Buntine, for advice on becoming a teacher.

In 1960, he applied for a teaching job at Caulfield Grammar.

"I was lucky, in those days you did not need to be teacher-trained," he said.

After a few years at Caulfield, his search for adventure took him further afield. Ian took a teaching role at Cochrane High School in Alberta, Canada.

Once there, Ian became keen to gain a broader understanding of the students he taught, and their individual learning needs. This saw him complete a degree in Psychology at University of Calgary, Canada.

'It really opened my eyes, in terms of teaching students who were experiencing learning problems.



“(Ian) constantly challenged us to look at new ideas, to support each other and develop an understanding together of the ‘how’ of teaching and to offer the fullest opportunity for every child,”  
- Bill Jennings, former teacher.

“I learnt how to adjust my teaching practices to really help,” he said.

Keen to put his new ideas into practice, Ian returned to Australia. After a stint as a Student Counsellor at Brighton Grammar, he started work at Mercer House - a teacher-training institute that focused on Special Needs education. By 1975, he was teaching a Diploma in Learning Disabilities at Burwood State College.

But in 1977, the siren call of his alma mater drew him away - The Geelong College Preparatory School were searching for a new Head of School.

The competition was fierce, but Ian Macmillan threw his hat in the ring, and was successful.

He would hold the position for ten years, with his tenure coinciding with his four daughters’ time at College.

“I felt lucky, and particularly proud, that I was Head of the Preparatory School during their time at school. It let me share in their school experiences,” Ian said.

Under Ian’s leadership, the Preparatory School was substantially modernised - physically and educationally.

Physically - Classrooms were refurbished, with new carpets and desks added to create better conditions for learning.

An Environment centre (the precursor to the current ‘Enviro Centre’) was established.

“It let students go and connect with the animals and nature. The focus was on emotional growth,” Ian said.

Educationally - Under Ian, education at The Geelong College Preparatory School was literally ‘turned on its ear’.

The learning style became very much tailored to Junior School students.

“We wanted a child-centred curriculum where student curiosity and enquiry were nurtured,”

“I believe schools must provide a way of life that helps children cope with the present, and prepare them for coping later in life,” he said.

For Ian, the use of films, television, visitors, excursions and discussions were part of a revised curriculum to create real-life experiences as opposed to just confining themselves to teaching by chalk.

Other significant curriculum developments were the Language and Arts Evaluation program and the introduction of a new Social Science curriculum and an outdoor education program for Junior School students.

One of the things Ian is most proud of was his introduction of an Indigenous Education program to College.

A forward-thinking initiative at the time, the aim was to ensure that every student left college with an understanding and knowledge about Aboriginal history, culture and languages as well as present-day issues.

The changes Ian made were welcomed across the board. His leadership encouraged good relationships, reflective teaching practices and a passion for teaching amongst his staff.

“If I had to describe my greatest achievement, it would be - having staff who understood what our vision and purpose was,” Ian said.

Past teachers who worked under Ian’s direction have described Ian as a ‘pioneer’, a ‘good leader’ and a ‘breath of fresh air who kept you on your toes’.

“He constantly challenged us to look at new ideas, to support each other and develop an understanding together of the ‘how’ of teaching and to offer the fullest opportunity for every child,” said former teacher, Bill Jennings.

However, all good things must come to an end, and Ian’s tenure at College was no exception to that.

After ten years as Head of the Preparatory School, Ian was ready for another challenge.

After nine years as Principal of Woodleigh School, he moved on to set



*Ian and wife, Diana.*

up his own Psychology practice on the Mornington Peninsula.

There, he specialised in helping young people with learning difficulties, provided them with strategies to manage and overcome their challenges. He retired only a few years ago in 2018.

Ian's bond to College has remained strong. He served on the College Council from 2003 to 2008 and has been instrumental in building one of the College's most important connections - our relationship to the tiny island of Tanna.

These days, Ian enjoys something of a quieter life. But, despite it being many years since school, Ian remains in close contact with many of his peers.

"We've been friends now for over 60 years.

"There are many of my past staff I stay in contact with, too."

Looking back on his life, Ian says he values his experience at College.

"It opened me up to investigating life beyond the school gates. It helped me reach out further and not be a closed mind," he said.



Watch an  
interview with Ian  
Scan the QR code  
or visit  
[cutt.ly/Macmillan](http://cutt.ly/Macmillan)

## The Macmillan family as Old Collegians

Ian Macmillan is part of a three-generation-deep line of Old Collegians. The family's history began with Ian's father, Wilfred, who started at The Geelong College as a boarder in 1913.

Wilfred was joined by his three brothers, Bert, Hamish and Lindsay, before enlisting (underage) in the First World War.

Ian's older brother, Don, attended College from 1940, whilst Ian started in 1947.

Ian's four daughters, Sally (OGC 1981), Fiona (OGC 1984), Jilly (OGC 1988) and Lucy (OGC 1991) also attended College.



## Where is Tanna?

Tanna is a small island, measuring 30km by 10km, located in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

Lenakel Presbyterian College is a school of 300 boarding and day students, situated on Tanna Island, Vanuatu. The Geelong College's connection to the island began as a result of Ian Macmillan's grandfather, Thomson Macmillan, who was a missionary on Tanna for 38 years in the early 1900s. Almost a century later, in 2008, Ian was able to reignite his family's connection.

Along with current teacher Phil Taylor, Teacher of Design and Creative Arts, and Shim George, Principal of LPC, Ian organised a school trip to Tanna. They took with them a group of Year 10 students, and began a vitally important reciprocal relationship that continues through to today.

Our students were able to immerse themselves in the Ni-Van culture at Lenakel Presbyterian College and gain valuable insights of a wide range of cultural experiences.

Under the leadership of Kevin Jess, Head of Design and Creative Arts, the College has continued to build strong relationships with the LPC community, especially through the College's fundraising efforts in 2015 to help provide much needed funds for the rebuilding of classrooms at LPC after the devastation caused by Cyclone Pam.

What started with a simple vision in 2008 has evolved through friendship and co-operation into a program that has lasting positive outcomes for both the LPC and Geelong College communities.



Images: 1. Ian at the first meeting in Tanna, 2. Ian's Grandfather, Thomas Macmillan, 3 & 4. College students teaching and learning in Tanna.