

## A kingdom of ideas

If ever an agent for change has set foot in The Geelong College, it was Mr Gebhardt. For some, it was a period of great liberation and creativity. Other members of the school community were very disappointed that Mr Stott had not succeeded Mr Thwaites. Staff in favour of Mr Stott's selection had lobbied Council on the matter, and so were less supportive of the 'new man' when he arrived, although Mr Gebhardt was unaware of what lay behind his cold reception. Others found the way in which change was proposed or managed to be just too radical, and sometimes his intractable position on certain topics too readily made enemies. At times, Mr Gebhardt appeared overly zealous in his bid to convince staff or Council that his idealistic notions of education would transform the College into a place that provided a truly liberal education, but some teachers found his talks to staff intellectually inspiring.<sup>1</sup> He has been accused of being too erudite and, despite the many extensive reports, articles and other documents that he wrote and presented on almost every topic imaginable relating to the College, unable to communicate his ideas to a general audience. Mr Gebhardt admits that he did not like large groups, or speaking at functions or Assemblies for the sake of it. In the end, his rigorous, writerly and academic approach to principalship, although admired by many, could never satisfy others who preferred a simpler oral style. 'He was a cultured man and, in hindsight, a strategic thinker, but rather forbidding to the students. I'm not sure he necessarily had the common touch that a private school Principal needs.'<sup>2</sup>

Mr Gebhardt was a boarder from the age of six at James Darling's Geelong Grammar (1930–61). It was Mr Darling whose personal recommendation of Mr Gebhardt – 'the best young Headmaster in Australia' – to the College Council in 1975 helped to win him the post.<sup>3</sup> Mr Gebhardt taught at Geelong Grammar, then Shore in Sydney before spending two influential years in America from 1963, undertaking a course in education at Harvard University and teaching at Milton Academy. He then became Principal of All Saints' School (1967–75) in Bathurst. A year of study leave in 1973 took him back to America. He reinvented All Saints' with the introduction of co-education and an emphasis on the arts and humanities, and created what was then a unique school experience in Australia when he instigated an Arts and Artists Week. Coming from this newly creative environment,



Peter Gebhardt

Peter Gebhardt on the occasion of his installation as Principal. On his left is Bruce Jamieson, then Moderator of the Geelong Presbytery of the Uniting Church, and on Mr Gebhardt's right is Dr Norman Wettenhall, Chairman of Council. The service was held at St David's Church



Mr Gebhardt was convinced that The Geelong College would benefit from similar changes and the provision of greater balance in its educational offerings.

His first weeks in Geelong confirmed these beliefs. He found the College 'austere and humourless' and the students lacking in self-reliance and social conscience, despite the long-held independent school ethos of service. He also found too much competitive sport at the expense of the Olympic spirit of participation and cooperation, and a neglect of the arts.<sup>4</sup> A liberal education, not vocational training, would be the aim of the College, to give:

both meaning and content to human lives; it is as much an attitude towards learning and, as such, transcends academic or vocational pursuits, narrow or otherwise. Excessive concessions to vocationalism or to career expectations serve only to rob schooling and education of some of their vital purposes: the commitment to ideas and to intellectual attitudes for their own sake, the pursuit of objective vision, the acquisition of the skills of critical analysis and judgement, the growth of the imagination, and the delight in learning for its own sake.<sup>5</sup>

To be a citizen of the city of the mind, Mr Gebhardt believed, 'you must enter the kingdom of ideas'.<sup>6</sup>

For Mr Gebhardt, the answer to the College's needs was to create an educational environment and relationships which supported individual growth and were related to participation and sharing: 'I am an unrepentant democratic elitist; I am committed to the optimistic and idealistic notion that dimensions of quality have to be injected into what the school does'.<sup>7</sup> Providing the conditions for the preservation and expansion of the imagination, seen as indispensable to cognitive, emotional and moral growth, became Mr Gebhardt's catchcry.<sup>8</sup> These ideas, based firmly on John Dewey's educational philosophies first encountered by Mr Gebhardt in 1963 at Harvard, were expounded at every available opportunity in speeches, talks to staff and newsletter articles. He told teachers to 'say interesting things in class', to read widely and to have a conversation with students (not to



Newly appointed Life Governors of The Geelong College: Garnet Fielding, Geoff Neilson, Ken Nall and Geoff Betts, 2004

present a 'dreary monologue').<sup>9</sup> He also encouraged some of them to undertake professional development, particularly through international teaching exchanges and study scholarships in the United States – opportunities that were embraced, for example, by Robert Casey (1972–82), Warren Harris (1974–2004), Bradley Olsen (1975–82) and David Wettenhall (1975–82).

Mr Gebhardt's zeal to bring about change was confronting. Believing that his viewpoint as a newcomer would be valued, he posed some difficult questions at his first Council planning meeting; for example: 'Why are there no staff or parent representatives on the Council?' and 'Is the school so besotted by "results" that the fun has all gone?'<sup>10</sup> He was somewhat surprised to find that the Council did not seem to have defined what it wanted 'other than in pre-Buntine perceptions which just do not fit now'.<sup>11</sup>

The responses to Mr Gebhardt's ideas about education at the College were mixed. He did not see eye to eye with the Council Chairman Dr Norman Wettenhall. Subsequent Council Chairmen, Mr Neilson (1978–81) and Garnet Fielding (1982–96), were more comfortable with Mr Gebhardt's philosophies: 'We are trying to produce a more sensitive person; the old system killed sensitivity. We aim for respect of the individual even if he is not captain of the football team ...'<sup>12</sup> According to Mr Gebhardt and his supporters, including Vice Principal David Happell (1977–88, 1990–94), Geelong was 'a very closed society',<sup>13</sup> and this inherent conservativeness was reflected in Council's composition and therefore stymied progress at the College. Mr Ingpen exhorted his fellow councillors to give the Principal 'a go' as, in his view, the College was self-satisfied and 'sheltering beneath the smug and secure umbrella of conformity' rather than producing 'non-conformist Geelong Collegians' who could help arrest society's 'drift to the edge of a physical and moral abyss ... The 20th Century needs them, with its rich nations growing richer and the poor nations growing poorer, with its increasing mastery over our physical environment and its increased power of destroying physical life.'<sup>14</sup> Brian Magee, President of the Parents' and Friends' Association, asserted: 'The Principal desires a more cultural atmosphere within the College. There are some who

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Principal Mr Gebhardt with the Governor General, Sir Zelman Cowen, at the opening of the Austin Gray Centre, 1980



do not agree with that, but there are many who do.<sup>15</sup> Others who were on Council during the 1970s and 1980s refute the notion of inherent conservatism on Council, despite a more general conservatism in Geelong, and instead assert that, with the exception of the boarding issue, there was much support for Mr Gebhardt's ideas. Some of the liberal, widely read and broad-minded members of Council – who included Fay Marles, Weston Bate, Alistair Hope, June Cameron, Robert Ingpen, Jill Everist, Robyn Smith, Bob Hale, Margaret Cameron and Dorothy Pizzey – remark on Mr Gebhardt's defensiveness (particularly after his first attempt to close the boarding house) and indicate that his personality tended to foster divisiveness rather than harmony.<sup>16</sup>

Mr Gebhardt's emphasis on the arts and humanities was intended to create a more humane generation. 'If a person is going to lead a humane life, then some contact with the studies which support that dimension, namely the humanities, is crucial', he explained, adding that 'the arts are a basic form of self-revelation and communication'.<sup>17</sup> He asked parents to support the school as it strove to achieve balance in the curriculum, and reminded them about the rigour and discipline involved in the study of any subject: 'there is nothing which other subjects demand which is not also demanded by the arts, except, perhaps, the capacity to go it alone in the face of the mockers'.<sup>18</sup> Mr Ingpen reflected: 'Good, human stuff comes out of good, human education'.<sup>19</sup>

Mr Gebhardt's 'kingdom of ideas' involved systemic cultural change. Diverse new activities were introduced, with the arts and humanities at their core. The Geelong College Concert Series began in 1977 and a College Gallery was established in 1978, replacing an ancient boys' urinal. Under the direction of Mr Elliott, and incorporating the House of Guilds, the Austin Gray Centre (named for an Old Collegian and Council member) opened in 1980, and provided facilities for both students and members of the local Geelong community to do courses in art, craft, music, photography, woodworking, dressmaking and

ceramics. This innovative approach soon attracted attention and visitors from other schools, such as Methodist Ladies' College (MLC) and Wesley College.<sup>20</sup> The Artists-in-Residence program began in 1976 with counter-tenor Mr Newnham (the Preparatory School's former Director of Music) as a Musician-in-Residence. Just as at Bathurst, Mr Gebhardt wanted these visitors to directly stimulate creativity and make aesthetic activity 'less remote' in a provincial city where 'there is very limited provision for students to engage in contact with professional artists'.<sup>21</sup> Les Murray, one of the Writers-in-Residence, was convinced that the best way to make art and literature come alive for school students was to expose them to real practitioners.<sup>22</sup> Many others echoed this, and also voice their profound sense of the role that the College was forging for itself as a patron of the arts in Australia, by employing practitioners in this way.<sup>23</sup> Artists-in-Residence are now an accepted and expected part of the College's program, just as they are at independent schools around Australia.

A Lecture Series on topical educational issues started in 1978, with speakers such as Manning Clark and John Button serving to introduce the College community to Mr Gebhardt's thinking. James McCaughey, Lecturer then in Drama at Deakin University, spoke about the arts in education, and Dr Malcolm Skilbeck, Director of the National Curriculum Development Centre in Canberra and a key driver in Australia of the introduction of John Dewey's educational philosophy, spoke on the question 'What do children really need to learn?'<sup>24</sup> Mr Gebhardt later regarded the Lecture Series as a failure, because in the end he had to resort to putting on a big dinner beforehand so that people would attend. He regarded the lack of support for some of his initiatives as evidence of Geelong's anti-intellectualism.<sup>25</sup> It could be interpreted differently, however: failure to patronise Mr Gebhardt's projects may have been a kind of protest against his suggestion in 1977 to abolish boarding (see Chapter 11).



Pottery at the Austin Gray Centre, 1982



Senior School staff, 1981. Back row: E. Manwaring, M. Keary, R. Wells, T. Egan, R. McLaren, R. Buttenshaw, J. Leyshon, C. Ingham, J. Jacobs, G. Wehrmann, P. Mead, M. Riordan, K. Hart, D. Wettenhall, M. Seeckts, G. Amezdroz, J. Windeyer, R. Shaw, R. Salen; Middle row: R. Cummins, J. Hawkes, D. Carroll, A. Grainger, K. Jarrett, P. Cronk, S. Farrall, W. Underwood, S. Fielding, J. Gibson, H. Colechin, F. Elliott, R. Barkley, A. Gibson, J. Strauch, R. Morris, A. Warren, B. Olsen, B. McLeod, R. Lancaster, D. Macbryde; Front row: V. Goodlett, R. Fraser, R. Doyle, W. Schofield, D. Spooner, J. Jordan, P. Richards, P. Wood, D. Happell, P. Gebhardt, J. Nelson, L. James, J. Danrell, J. Eggleston, W. Harris, M. Champness, M. Owens, J. Gibson

Despite Mr Gebhardt's acute disappointment in some of the responses to key components of his vision for the College, and his growing sense of isolation, he forged ahead.<sup>26</sup> In addresses to staff and in erudite articles in the newsletter, he consistently kept Dewey, democracy and culture at the core of his educational message. At every opportunity, he appointed talented young teachers who shared his philosophies. Of particular importance was the early introduction of Australian Studies, to provide students with an explicit understanding of their own immediate cultural environment. A former student of Mr Gebhardt's from Bathurst, Andrew Gibson (1978–97), was appointed to teach the new Australian Studies course which became compulsory at the College in Form 5 in 1978. It included Australian history, literature, politics, economics and sociology, explored through poetry, creative writing, drama, art and photography. It was the first known course of its type in Victoria, as many educators then regarded an interdisciplinary approach as being quite radical. It became an accepted part of the curriculum and attracted attention from Senator Susan Ryan when she visited the College in 1984 as the then Federal Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, to open the second stage of the Rolland Centre. The College trialled the proposed Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) course in Australian Studies in 1988 (although somewhat different to the College's course) in preparation for its introduction across Victoria in 1990.<sup>27</sup> Some of Mr Gebhardt's other key staff appointments included Mr Happell (Vice Principal), Mr Macmillan (Preparatory School Head), John Jacobs (1979–83, English Teacher), John Gibson (1977–90, Head of Drama), Philip Mead (1981–85, Head

of English), Rodney Cummins (1977–97, English Teacher), Rod Fraser (Head of Social Sciences) and John Leyshon (Head of Science), who joined excellent young teachers already on staff, such as Mr Harris (Mathematics and Chemistry Teacher, later Head of Science).<sup>28</sup>

Many students embraced the new opportunities and were more comfortable with the balance of activities on offer. First as extracurricular activities, then later as subjects, students could study Philosophy with Kevin Hart (1980–83) and Ancient Greek with Michael Keary (1962–96), whose outstanding scholarship saw him teach many other subjects, including English, History and Religious Education. Students began to compete happily in activities beyond the sporting arena, such as debating, chess and public speaking. School Captain Robert Vickers-Willis (1977), who experienced the College's cultural change as a high-achieving schoolboy athlete, summed up the shift this way:

Over the years it has been a trend of Geelong College to be almost exclusively sport oriented in its sense of achievement. Unfortunately not all students are able to achieve satisfaction in all sporting areas. I trust that this year we have moved towards a better balance in school activities and in our sense of values. It is hoped that these new activities and ideas will broaden the opportunities for all students, as it is important that each student at Geelong College attains a sense of personal achievement and identity whilst at school.<sup>29</sup>

Student Gideon Haigh, who excelled at public speaking and debating, felt that he could follow his 'intellectual whims with a degree of freedom', and found Latin particularly stimulating, partly because it was still being taught by the revered and eccentric Mr Keary, who remained 'passionate and captivated by his chosen intellectual pursuit' and so provided a 'benchmark of mastery' for his students.<sup>30</sup>

Music gradually began to hold its place again in students' hearts and minds, as it had done when Mr Logie-Smith was at the College, but this time under Mr Newnham, who returned to the Senior School as Director of Music (1976–81). House Music was re-introduced in 1983, in the same year that the Stage Band was formed. It won the Geelong Eisteddfod that year, just as the Concert Band had the year before when it was first formed. The Chamber Singers also regularly won their section at the same competition, and the College marked out a position of distinction for itself in Geelong's music world from the early 1980s and has continued to earn that place. Students also took on new challenges, such as the production of an award-winning performance at the Rock 'n' Roll Eisteddfod in 1984.

Drama blossomed under actor and National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) graduate, John Gibson. Drama had been introduced as a Form 5 subject in 1976 and, under his creative direction from 1977, was made compulsory at Form 3 and extended to Higher School Certificate (HSC) level in 1978. Although the first class had only eight students, it was judged a great success, not least from the determination of two of those students who pursued entry to NIDA – one as an actor and one as a designer.<sup>31</sup> Mr Gibson took students to Sydney to observe NIDA acting classes and directed many school plays and musicals that demonstrated students' acting, singing and dancing talents. Guy Pearce (1985), the College's most famous actor, was one of Mr Gibson's Drama students. Staff participated in school plays, too, particularly Mr Mead, Andrew Gibson, Mr Jacobs and Mr Gebhardt – the latter as Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* in 1981.

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Creatively talented teachers of the humanities were fundamental to the success of the new approach, especially in English. Creative Arts Fellows also had a significant impact on the improved English results, as well as on the culture of the College, by continually bringing in young creative experts willing to communicate to students a passion for their discipline, regardless of their lack of teaching experience. Fellows differed from Artists-in-Residence as they were usually in the school for longer periods, perhaps a year. Again, the program emphasised creativity and the role of an arts and humanities education for its own sake. Mr Gebhardt's strategy aimed to improve the English faculty and, with it, HSC English results. Himself an English Teacher, he believed the shake-up to be warranted. HSC English results (only 70 per cent of students passed in 1980) continually dragged down the College's overall HSC pass rate. Another excellent new English Teacher appointed at this time was Dr Wendy Morgan (1982–88), who later became Head of English.

Mr Mead, one of the first Arts Fellows, who preceded Dr Morgan as Head of English, described the Creative Arts Fellowship program as an 'experiment in bigness', underlining the fact that the emphasis on writers was far from accidental because 'literacy and language skills have been revealed as the major deficiencies of the students'.<sup>32</sup> Other Australian writers who came as Fellows included Les Murray, Judith Rodriguez, Jack Hibberd and Roger McDonald. By 1979, there appeared to be a genuine love of literature and reading. Walter McVitty, a university Lecturer in Librarianship, was an Artist-in-Residence that year and was impressed with teachers' knowledge of contemporary literature: 'It is a place which seems to be permeated by reading – and the love of reading. There are very few schools anywhere where this is so much in evidence and in such a pervasive and sustained way.'<sup>33</sup> The HSC English pass rate improved to 86 per cent in 1984, and the Principal was pleased, believing fundamentally that language is the 'handmaiden' of the mind.<sup>34</sup>

Mr Hart, who has since earned an international reputation as a university academic for his writings on critical theory and postmodernism, was Poet-in-Residence at the College in 1979 and returned as a staff member the following year to introduce a Form 6 course on Philosophy. Enthusiastic students gave up three spare periods a week and also attended one class after school, even though the subject did not count towards any final marks.<sup>35</sup> Apart from small sections of curricula in Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory, The Geelong College was then the only secondary institution in the country where Philosophy was taught as a separate subject.<sup>36</sup> Peter Rosson, the Creative Arts Fellow at the College in 1984, could see sharp change in the school since he had been a student there fifteen years earlier. Some staff, however, were uneasy about the presence of Fellows because few had teaching qualifications or experience.<sup>37</sup>

The School Evaluation, conducted partly as self-evaluation but mostly by an external group of 'experts' in 1981, also challenged the school's processes and methods. Mr Gebhardt hoped that it would uncover any problems not yet considered in his quest for systemic change, and that it would further underline his agency as Principal and main persuader of 'continuing professional evaluation and development'.<sup>38</sup> He wanted, for example, ongoing commitment to academic rigour at all levels in the school so that the Form 6 became 'less a state of emergency', and he worried that some students were not set enough goals and challenges to keep them stimulated.<sup>39</sup> In 1981, the majority of HSC students opted for Mathematics and Sciences, with Biology, General Mathematics and Chemistry as the top three subject choices alongside compulsory English. English Literature, French, Latin,



Art and Music had classes of between only two and twelve students.<sup>40</sup> Academic results did improve to 90 per cent pass rates in HSC by 1984 and 1985.<sup>41</sup> However, the School Evaluation questioned whether the curriculum actually fulfilled the College's aim to provide 'well balanced liberal education', given that most Year 11 and 12 students still studied Mathematics and Sciences and that no History was being taught at Years 9 and 10.<sup>42</sup> The final report also drew attention to the College's identity problem: it was no longer really a boarding school given the huge decline in numbers, but nevertheless still had boarders; and despite its professed commitment to co-education, it was in fact still essentially a boys' school with some girls.

To the horror of many Old Collegians and parents, the idea that the College would withdraw from APS competitive sport was proposed as a formal recommendation in the School Evaluation report.<sup>43</sup> The suggestion was interpreted as an attack on College tradition, despite the logical arguments concerned with the extent of APS sporting requirements on weeknights and Saturdays during most of the year, to the exclusion of other activities and the resultant isolation of students and staff from other social and cultural opportunities.<sup>44</sup> Mr Doyle, then an English Teacher at the College, knew that many current parents would not have supported such a big change: 'Do we leave the APS and encourage involvement in community sports in Geelong? This would arouse conflict with the many parents who want their children to compete against the Melbourne schools like Scotch or Wesley.'<sup>45</sup>

Mr Happell agreed with Mr Gebhardt about changing the College's emphasis on APS sport. Neither favoured the way the highly competitive sporting environment of the APS system dominated the culture of the College. Mr Happell wondered why

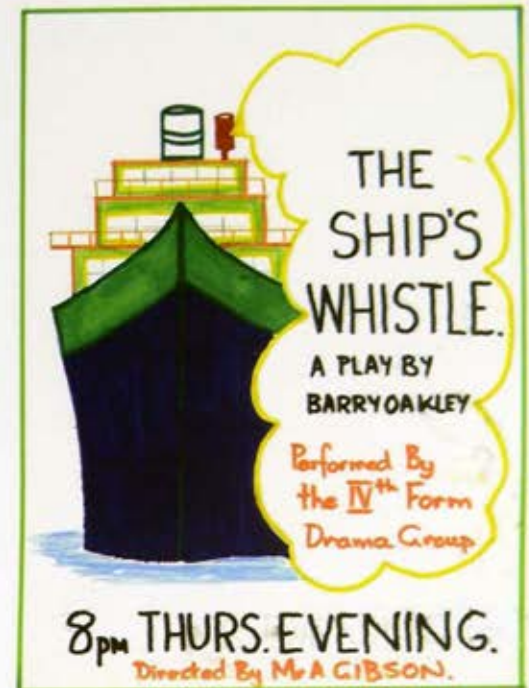
we subordinate other educational principles that may have an equally beneficial effect on the school just to satisfy the despotic demands of a few Melbourne schools to whom independence means conformity? What about the school reflecting the needs and aspirations of the community? I'm afraid I cannot bring myself to believe this absurd sporting set-up has any justification whatsoever.<sup>46</sup>

College students were being encouraged to play in local Geelong competitions as an important strategy to link the College with its local community in positive relationships. However, APS competition still reigned supreme, and students with clashing fixtures were instructed that school sport must take priority over club or community sporting interests.<sup>47</sup>

The situation dismayed the Principal:

There can be no doubt that Australian schools – all schools – have been dominated by a competitive ethic which finds its most widespread embodiment in sporting activities. Meanwhile we hunger after premierships – they represent performance, products and competitive sport institutionalises violence, aggression, crudity and barbarity – 'the hurrah of the masses'. Competition provides evidence of success and the people are made subsidiary to the institution. The kingdom of heaven is open to those who wear ties so long as they are old-school ties. The athletic support and the tie are the key gifts of the gods to man.<sup>48</sup>

Though typical, his outspokenness must, nevertheless, have been shocking to those members of the College community for whom sporting prowess and striving for APS Premierships were a fundamental part of the school's identity.



Poster for Form 4's Drama Group play

In 1980, Mr Gebhardt could no longer stand some of the crude traditions associated with the Head of the River, practised since at least the early 1960s when current and former Collegians were arrested for offensive behaviour during a disorderly party at the boat shed afterwards.<sup>49</sup> He banned the rowdy send-off, slogan painting and frog dances, and made his expectations of students' behaviour explicit at a school Assembly:

The grunt at the other school's crew on the river bank is both savage and crude, obscene and obnoxious. You may cheer, barrack and sing so long as you remain conscious of what you are doing, not become unconscious cousins of zombies and yahoos. If some or all of the crews can succeed I will be delighted. That delight will turn rapidly sour if those who choose to ride on the back of the success allow their dignity to be compromised by either the distasteful or the destructive.<sup>50</sup>

He promptly received many complaints. One, from an anonymous Old Collegian, lamented the loss of tradition and school spirit. Gebhardt responded by pointing out that 'school spirit – a nebulous concept at best – derives from real achievements by both individuals and groups ... We cannot perpetuate "traditions" of ugliness which are nothing less than bad habits of very recent origin and not traditional.'<sup>51</sup> And so the battle lines were drawn. After a few quiet years, the issue reached boiling point again when the Principal threatened some members of the Boys' 1st VIII crew with expulsion before the Head of the River race because of their poor behaviour: 'No-one is going to look up to a group that shows an incredible capacity for being vain, arrogant; the worst group for years, distinguished currently by one thing only: bloated heads, a selfish concern for a position in the eight rather than a concentrated, thoughtful and dedicated concern to row well'.<sup>52</sup>

Crucial to the understanding of the 'disconnect' between Mr Gebhardt's vision for the College and the influential body of parents and Old Collegians who resisted change is the school's original foundation on a safe and familiar Presbyterian conservatism which set at odds new ways and old. Changes to revered College customs also extended, during most of Mr Gebhardt's period, to the very core of the relationship between the Presbyterian Church and the College. The College became locked in a protracted process of liberation from the Church that began with the formation of the Uniting Church in 1977. Dominant Scottish Presbyterianism had been part and parcel of the College's identity since its establishment, with several decades of its being run as a private school by the Morrisons, and more than two decades of its being run by an ordained minister, Mr Rolland. Until 1982, there was an 'overriding understanding that the Presbyterian Assembly in Collins Street would have the final say' on matters such as the selection of a Principal and large financial outlays.<sup>53</sup> The Church's influence on school life was felt in every way, until after incorporation. However, the path to incorporation was long and difficult, and overshadowed by the very public and bitter brawl between the Church, Scotch College and PLC. Against those schools' wishes, they became property of the Continuing Presbyterian Church when Church assets were divided in 1977. The other nine Presbyterian schools, including The Geelong College, were attached to the Uniting Church. A protracted legal dispute between Scotch, PLC and the Church, not concluded until 1980, did not alter the decision, but delayed the other nine schools' wish to seek incorporation.<sup>54</sup> Eventually, in 1982, incorporation 'liberated the College from the strictures of the Presbyterian Assembly'.<sup>55</sup> The period from 1977 to 1982

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Dominant Scottish Presbyterianism had been part and parcel of the College's identity since its establishment.

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was, therefore, a crucial one of transition in the school's identity – socially, religiously and educationally – as traditional College ties were loosened forever.

The new relationship with the Uniting Church had barely been settled in 1982 when dramatic education budget cuts were announced. The impact of the impending government funding cuts in 1983 would reduce the College's income from that source by 42 per cent. Fees were raised by 14 per cent, and the equivalent of seven full-time staff lost their jobs.<sup>56</sup> Regardless of the tough economic situation, the Principal expected staff to retain their competence and their commitment to their profession to ensure complete parental satisfaction and avoid any potential for further loss of school income through loss of enrolments:

Parents and Friends 'Get to know you' evening, 1978

I consider there is a responsibility to use some vacation time for the purposes of examining teaching practices and materials, for reading in our appropriate fields. The world knows that we cannot ignore the economic climate and I exhort you to maintain cohesion in the face of the unpalatable and unpleasant austerities which we have to adopt if we want a school at all.<sup>57</sup>

During 1984, and after much discussion and deliberation, Council declined to renew Mr Gebhardt's contract, which was due to expire at the end of 1985. Mr Gebhardt's responses to contrary opinions caused divisions in both the staff and the parent body and, in the opinion of a majority of Council members, such ongoing division was too detrimental to the school.<sup>58</sup> Although some on Council wanted the decision to be made public immediately, it was eventually decided to delay the announcement until 1985.<sup>59</sup> It was a most difficult period, particularly given the deteriorating relationship between the Principal and the Council Chairman, Mr Fielding, caused in part by the refusal of Mr Fielding to countenance the dismantling of College boarding. He and a majority of members of Council had by then 'formed the view that the Principal was manifestly unhappy in the school and, in the interests of all concerned, adhered to the strongly held position that no extension [to Mr Gebhardt's contract] would be granted'.<sup>60</sup>

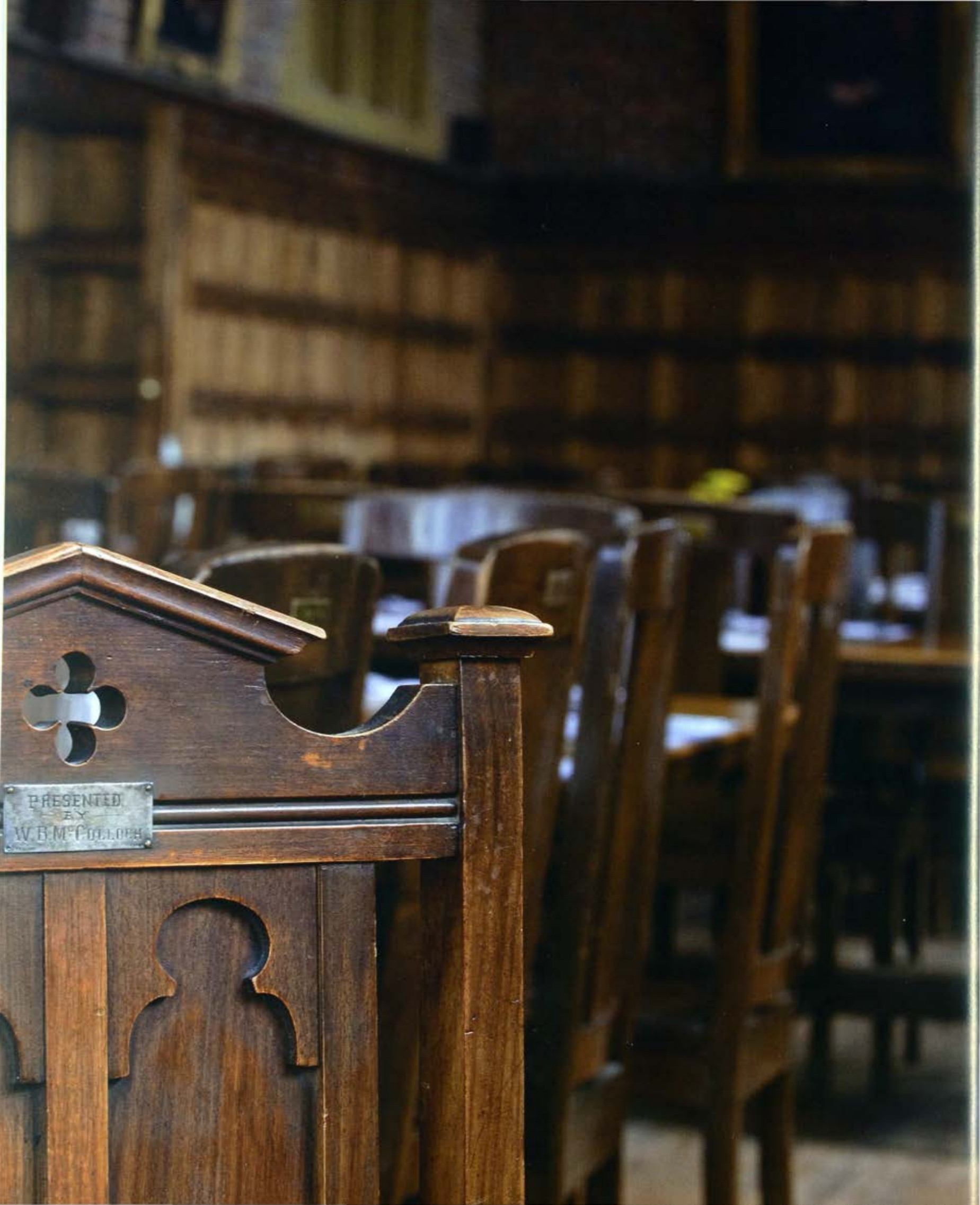
When Mr Gebhardt's resignation was announced, a newspaper concluded:

His 10 years have been peppered with controversy. He has been accused of being anti-sport, anti-tradition, and preoccupied with academic achievement. Midway through his term there were cloaked moves among some former students to have the Principal sacked and at times his attempts to bring the school and its wider community closer were met with ambivalence ... Probably the greatest fuss followed his threat, soon after his appointment, to withdraw the school's crew from ... the Head of the River [because of the] barbaric [street painting] that went on. There is no doubt that Peter Gebhardt arrived at the College still with abundant idealism. In his Bathurst days he 'felt that schools could transform the world'. By the time he left the Geelong College he concluded 'Now I know they can't'.<sup>61</sup>

He had been the subject of strong criticism, usually behind his back, but sometimes even publicly through insults painted on the streets. It is hardly surprising, then, that he turned away from education and pursued a legal career. 'He would tell you exactly what he thought and wouldn't modify it to become what people wanted him to say. He was greatly misunderstood', concludes Mr Neilson.<sup>62</sup> 'I didn't play ball with the "Newtown cocktail circuit", and they didn't like it', reflects Mr Gebhardt.<sup>63</sup>

Mr Macmillan's speech, on behalf of the school staff when Mr Gebhardt left, remarked that the Principal had been a reforming educator, despite the fact that schools are hard to change. He remarked on Mr Gebhardt's incisive mind, and marvellous grasp of language that he used to express his clear vision for the College, and also on the fact that these traits had the staff somewhat nervously on their toes whenever the Principal was around: 'Some of us were uncomfortable in his presence. His penetrating stare sometimes made us skip a word, stutter, or wonder if what we were saying was jibberish. We knew we had to think about education and what we were doing. We were required to be professional, we were encouraged to use our imaginations and we were allowed to use our autonomy.'<sup>64</sup> For Mr Gebhardt, however, his time at the College ended bitterly. His valedictory speech farewelled more than the students and the College, but also his own 'rampant idealism which envisaged schools as the salvation of the world', and the 'sometimes narrow and mean-spirited provincialism'

that he experienced in Geelong.<sup>65</sup> Later he wrote, 'While it cannot be said that I succeeded in my role in Geelong, I did learn much about loyalty and loyalties'.<sup>66</sup> Coincidentally or otherwise, Mr Ingpen and the Reverend Dr Davis McCaughey left College Council at the end of Mr Gebhardt's incumbency, and before the expiration of their Council tenure.<sup>67</sup> Several disappointed senior staff members, including Mr Macmillan and Mr Happell, also left within a few years, making way for generational change. Others in the community were relieved, and Council immediately held a Planning Day, covering topics that ranged from boarding to the curriculum, in preparation for the new Principal.



PRESENTED  
BY  
W. B. McCULLOUGH

