To become fine
SPORTS WOMEN

The History Of Health, Physical Education And Sport
At Brisbane Girls Grammar School 1875-2010

Pauline Harvey-Short
To become fine sportswomen

The History of Health, Physical Education and Sport at Brisbane Girls Grammar School 1875–2010

Pauline Harvey-Short
Introduction
“The practice of physical education and sport is a fundamental right of all.”¹

“Sport is a complex phenomenon which acts as an important agent of both social change and social control and modifies and defines female roles in society at large.”²

There are many reasons a book such as this should be written. Firstly, Brisbane Girls Grammar School has played a significant role in the education of young Queensland women for 135 years. The School was created from “The Eton of Australia”, Brisbane Grammar School, by forward-thinking fathers and men, later often confused by what they produced or set in motion. However, the commitment to equity in education for girls by the Trustees, the Lady Principals and the wider community provided, and continues to provide, a tangible role model for girls’ schools throughout Australia.

Secondly, the discovery of unknown or untold stories that have emerged during research alone justify the writing of the book. These amazing stories enrich the history of the School and bring to life the many Grammar women who have contributed to its reputation.

Brisbane Girls Grammar School has created a formidable legacy in the disciplines of Health Education, Physical Education and Sport. Many students become Physical Education teachers, coaches, sports administrators and sportswomen and acknowledge the strong influence of the School in these pursuits. At a time when the participation rate of Queensland children in organised sport is lower than the national average, when the national average ratio of women to men on boards is one in seven, and when 39.6% of women are employed in physical activity and recreation jobs, this legacy has a significant role in Queensland education and sport.

Amongst the legion of Grammar alumni are women who have administered international sporting bodies (Deirdre Hyland); national sporting organisations (Daphne Pirie, Wendy Callinan, Jane Allen); State sporting organisations (Anita Hobson-Powell, Pauline Harvey-Short); officiated at international competitions (Meryl Papas, Ellena Papas, Mary Seefried); and coached from the highest level (Phoebe Anderson) to the school level where, in 2009, 77 of the 141 Grammar coaches were alumni. Over the years no fewer than seventeen women returned to the School to teach Physical Education, with many others teaching at other private and public schools. Their contribution has been highly significant for the young women at Girls Grammar, as well as in the secondary and tertiary sector in Queensland education where many of these teachers continued their study to become lecturers in the discipline of Physical Education and Human Movement Studies (Barbara Devenish-Meares, Denise Wanchap nee Palmer).

Another aspect of these stories and role modelling is the contribution of the Grammar girls who chose to become elite athletes and who were motivated and/or introduced to their sport at school, such as Olympians Barbara Wilson, Nikita Cuffe and Susie Fraser. By the recording of the stories of these women and their journeys, the current Grammar girl has tangible role models as inspiration.

¹ UNESCO International Charter of Physical Education and Sport, article 1, 1978.
Another motivating factor for the book is that a neglected area of research in the education of young Queensland women has been the disciplines of Physical Education and Health and interschool Sport. Physical activity played an important role in the development of the new State of Queensland and in the lives of the State’s sons and daughters. It enhanced healthy lifestyles and provided a sense of loyalty to their school and their newly established State.

The early principals strongly believed in a “sound mind in a sound body”, or to quote Juvenal, “mens sana in corpore sano”. This philosophy was embedded in English public schools and universities where the early Girls Grammar principals had been trained. During the nineteenth century in England, girls’ education had finally come of age with the establishment of girls’ secondary schools, the two most influential and lauded being North London Collegiate and Cheltenham Girls School. The former fully embraced sport for girls and the qualities sport could deliver, and the latter believed in the therapeutic elements of Swedish gymnastics and rhythmical exercise to complement the education of girls. Women were being accepted into English universities and training colleges which were being established expressly to train women to teach Physical Education.

---

To become fine SportsWomen

The early Grammar teachers and principals came from this environment and arrived in Australia with a mission to make a difference, particularly for girls, and with the capacity to do so. Queensland secondary education was a blank canvas on which these early educators could make their mark. The principals had the vision and the teachers had to make it a reality.

The Physical Education and sporting history at Brisbane Girls Grammar School has been a fascinating one, with three significant eras. The first paralleled the career of Dorothy Brockway (1913–1934), who had specialist training and experience in England and introduced the School to an extensive and systematic physical education structure, while conducting her own private business in swimming and therapy from her home. Miss Brockway consolidated the subject and sporting performance so that the School enjoyed outstanding success in interschool competitions, with the School winning the Queensland Girls’ Secondary Schools Sports Association (QGSSSA) Cup on fourteen occasions during her tenure.

The second landmark for Physical Education and sport in the School was the appointment of Meg Rorke (1944–1955). Rorke was the first full-time Physical Education teacher in a secondary girls’ school in Queensland and had graduated with the new Diploma in Physical Education from The University of Queensland. This meant Physical Education and Sport had a consistent philosophy and method of delivery, as Meg Rorke oversaw coaches and academic staff who supplemented her work. Again during this era, the School experienced great success in the sporting arena, winning six athletics titles, eight netball pennants and three McWhirter Cups for interschool lifesaving. The subject also saw a period of well-organised, systematic programs that had a far-reaching impact on many Grammar girls.

The third era was the introduction of the ROSBA Senior Subject of Health and Physical Education in 1978. This course was written and taught by Pauline Harvey-Short who eventually accepted the responsibility for the department, which evolved from three staff to two faculties with nineteen staff. This was the most significant time for the subject as it was recognised as a challenging, legitimate academic subject and fully embraced in the academic fabric of the School.
To become fine SportsWomen.

1945: McWhirter Cup winners.
Back row (left to right): Shirley Bowcock, Carmel Ryan, Lenore Case, Beryl Freeman, June Gillmeister;
front row (left to right): Jill Shanahan, Lois Freeman (captain), Doreen Urquhart.
To become fine SportsWomen

The strength of the Queensland Studies Authority and core subjects was reflected in sporting success, with the School experiencing many highlights. Notable amongst these were Cross Country domination and winning the three overall Association pennants presented to the QGSSSA school with the greatest number of successes in a year. This concept was a reintroduction of recognition of the dominant school in QGSSSA, which previously saw the awarding of a cup. This pennant was only awarded for three years: 1996, 1997 and 1998.

Throughout the School’s history the subject was compulsory and sport was perceived as a most important and necessary extension of the classroom, contributing to the balanced development of each student and providing her with opportunities to excel physically; shoulder responsibility as a team member and leader; take risks, both physical and emotional, in a controlled, safe environment; and develop interpersonal skills.

Milisent Wilkinson, Lady Principal (1900–1912), summed up the importance of girls experiencing a full and diverse education when she stated:

The question of the right education of its women is of paramount importance to Queensland; we must therefore make it our supreme aim to train brain, body and soul, to imbue the girls with a spirit of industry, and instil in them high ideals of duty and honour. A nation has two valuable assets; one is the courage of its men, and there are many people who think that nothing else is of any importance. There is, however, another no less precious asset, and that is the “goodness” of womanhood. To send out from the School good women and true, women who know the meaning of “Duty”, who have learnt, no less than their brothers, how to play the game and who have done their part no less grandly, though perhaps more silently, in shaping the destinies of the country,—this is my constant aim and endeavour, for by the character of the men and women a school sends out into the world, it must be ultimately judged.4

1946: Swimming Team Back row (left to right): Barbara Parker, Lenore Case, Peggy Thorne, Shirley Bowcock, Nita Haussmann, Lenore Waddell, and Hazel Palmer; seated (left to right): Natalia Potanin, Beryl Freeman (captain), Doreen Unquhart

1953: McWhirter Cup winning team (left to right): Ada Ball, Jill Malouf (captain), Jill McAskill, Noeleen Cooley

4 Headmistress’s Annual Report, 1910
To become fine SportsWomen

Introduction

c1901: Milisent Wilkinson seated sixth from left with staff and pupils
2008: Golf lesson at Victoria Park with the School in the background
Chapter 1

The vision years

- Before 1875
- Sir Charles Lilley
- Establishment of the “Girls’ Branch”
To become fine SportsWomen

I believe that female education in this colony, indeed in every country of the world, has been seriously neglected … I propose to give to woman such education as will fit her to become what I believe she is eminently fitted for—by her gentleness, tact, and skill in reaching the human mind—the best instructor of youth.\(^5\)

Queensland was established as a new colony by an Order-in-Council of 6 June 1859. The population on separation from New South Wales was 23,520 scattered residents with one hundred females to every one hundred and fifty males.\(^6\) The Governor of the new colony was Sir George Ferguson Bowen, a highly intelligent, well-educated man of vision who believed the burning issues for the new colony were education, land and immigration. It is therefore not surprising that in the first sitting of Parliament, the Grammar Schools Act 1860 would be passed.

The “Act allowed for the establishment of a grammar school in any town where at least £1,000 could be raised locally. The Act provided for a Government subsidy of twice this local contribution”\(^7\), thus creating an alliance between government and the local community.

The Schools were to be administered by a seven member Board of Trustees, of which four members were appointed by the Governor. The Act also made provision for public scholarships for students to university in Britain or the southern states of Australia.\(^8\)

The ten Queensland grammar schools that resulted from this Act of Parliament were established in the image of the English public schools. The English grammar schools evolved from the medieval grammar schools established to educate students for the priesthood, university or civic duties where a liberal education was essential. An integral part of the grammar school tradition came from Dr Thomas Arnold, Headmaster of the Rugby School. He espoused “muscular Christianity” where the total individual was educated. Dr Arnold believed the mind, body and spirit were nurtured by promoting physical education, leadership, social and moral duty, and school spirit as well as academic excellence and rigour.

Education for girls at this time in Queensland was dependent on the ability of the family to financially support their daughters. Although The Act to Provide for Primary Education in Queensland had been passed in 1860, the government found it impossible to fund this concept of universal primary education. Education for girls, therefore, was either conducted in the home under the supervision of a governess, conducted at a convent school such as All Hallows, conducted as haphazard attendance at a primary school such as the Normal School (under the guidance of Margaret Berry) or not at all. At this stage, “higher” education was not a consideration for women in the colony.

Sir Charles Lilley was a passionate advocate for women’s education, compulsory, secular primary education, and secondary and tertiary education. As a member of the Royal Commission into Education 1874, he and its other members believed that “parents considered that their daughters ought to have equal advantages with their sons”\(^9\). Although Lilley’s vision for education in Queensland did not emerge at this time, his beliefs and the recommendations of the Royal Commission did provide the opportunity for initial structures to be

\(^5\) Sir C. Lilley, 1873.
\(^9\) Report Royal Commission into Education, 1874, p. 95.
put in place to ensure its future. Hence, the Brisbane Grammar School Trustees were supportive of the establishment of a “girls’ branch” of the school where the boys’ school would provide support with the curriculum and instruction.

A sub-committee of Trustees, with members Mr Justice Lilley, The Honourable The Attorney-General Mr Bernays and Mr Charles Mein, had been appointed to evaluate the feasibility of the establishment of the girls’ branch of the Brisbane Grammar School, and on its recommendation on 12 December 1874 the following advertisement was placed in The Brisbane Courier.

**BRISBANE GRAMMAR SCHOOL.**

The Trustees of the Brisbane Grammar School, having under consideration the advisability of establishing a Branch School for Girls not under 12 years of age, which in the system of education is intended to be similar to the system they have sanctioned for their Boys’ School, request parents who would avail themselves of the School, if established, to communicate with the Head-master of the Grammar School on or before the 31st instant.

**THOMAS HARLIN**

Head-master

Regulations for the management of the girls’ school were recorded in the minutes of a Special Meeting of the sub-committee held in the Attorney-General’s office, which read:

The following letter was read:—From the Under Colonial Secretary transmitting the following regulations for the management of the Girls’ School, as approved by the Governor in Council and published in the Government Gazette.  

---

10 BGS Trustees Minutes, Thursday 18 February 1875, p. 245.

These regulations provoked comment from Fredrick Swannick, a teacher at Kangaroo Point School and a witness of the Royal Commission into Education in 1874, where he stated, “Let us rejoice, that at last, good common sense has decided our girls will have the unspeakable advantage of physical training”.  

With the confirmation from the Colonial Undersecretary that the regulations for the Girls’ School had been approved, all necessary requirements for establishing the school under the Grammar Schools Act 1860 had been fulfilled and the appointment of the Lady Principal was the next step. According to the Minutes of the Board of Trustees,
Mr Bernays moved; Mr Mein seconded; and it was unanimously resolved:- That Mrs Janet O’Connor, of Ballarat, be the Lady Principal of the Girls’ School. The Trustees resolved to appoint Mrs E A Elcock of Milton Assistant Teacher in the Girls’ School for three months from the 1st of March 1875, with Salary at the rate of £150 per annum, payable monthly.\(^\text{12}\)

At this same meeting the Trustees resolved to establish the school in George Street in the two-storey brick property of Henry Holmes for the rent of £1.15.0 per week and Mr Harlin, Headmaster of the Brisbane Grammar School, was instructed to accept Mr Holmes’ offer.

Mrs Janet O’Connor arrived in Brisbane on Thursday 4 March and was welcomed by Mr Justice Lilley and Mr Mein.

The following announcement appeared in *The Brisbane Courier* on 13 March 1875:

---

**Education**
**BRISBANE GRAMMAR SCHOOL**
**GIRLS SCHOOL, GEORGE STREET**

Lady Principal ... ... Mrs J O’Connor  
Assistant Teacher ... ... Mrs E A Elcock

THE SCHOOL will be OPENED on MONDAY, the 15th instant, at 9am. FEES, which are payable in advance, may be paid either at the Grammar School; or to the Honorary Treasurer C.S. Mein Esq. M.A.; Queen Street for the credit of the Honorary Treasurer, at the Union Bank. The School hours, for the present, will be from 9am to 12 noon; and from 12.30pm till 2.30pm.

Mrs O’Connor will receive visitors on school business from half past two till half past four THIS AFTERNOON.

---

**THOMAS HARLIN**

---

\(^{12}\) BGS Trustees Minutes, Thursday 18 February 1875, p. 246.
As the George Street property had proven unsuitable for Mr Harlin and his family, it was not surprising that Mrs O’Connor deemed it unsuitable to house the Girls’ branch of the Grammar School. After a degree of negotiating, the school was relocated to the corner of Lilley Street and Wickham Terrace in early August in the former residence of Mr Justice Douglas.

By the end of the first year, the average enrolment was fifty students, who came from diverse backgrounds ranging from the working class to daughters of members of the clergy, medical and legal professions. The number of students over the next few years fluctuated with the resignation of Principals Janet O’Connor and Sarah Cargill. Mary Mackinlay was appointed Lady Principal in 1878. During Mackinlay’s stewardship the School’s enrolment grew to average seventy-nine students.

During these difficult years, Lady Principals struggled with the lack of autonomy, the dependence on the masters of the Brisbane Grammar School and the direct management of the Brisbane Grammar School’s Headmaster, Thomas Harlin.

The concept of separation had been supported by the new Headmaster of the boys’ school, Reginald Heber Roe, as he reported on the academic success of both the girls and the boys in the Sydney examinations in his Annual Report of 1878.

The experience of the past year has shown that the hope of the Trustees to work the two institutions together, at least temporarily, was no vain chimera. I say temporarily for I see no reason for the connection to be permanent when once the public are sufficiently alive to the necessity for higher education for girls no less than for boys, to support a separate Girls’ Grammar School.\(^\text{13}\)

In 1881 Sir Charles Lilley announced at the girls’ school December break-up concert that the Trustees had determined to seek funding for the foundation of the Girls Grammar School. They sought to establish a separate trust, build a separate building and obtain the girls’ school its own endowment. (B Hebden notes, BGGS Archives)

In 1882 Sophia Beanland was appointed Headmistress of an independent girls’ school of seventy-four students and had the honour of delivering the first annual report by the Headmistress on Foundation Day in 1883. Beanland’s timely appointment enabled her to work with the architect, Richard Gailey, on the design of the new school building, which was to be situated on three acres of land adjacent to the Brisbane Grammar School on Gregory Terrace.

\(^{13}\) J. Hancock, op. cit., p. 128.
To become fine SportSWomen

1883: Ground and first floor plans of the School
The plans allowed for classrooms, music rooms, an assembly hall, a library and a laboratory for practical chemistry, as well as accommodation for thirty boarders.\textsuperscript{14}

The foundation stone was laid by Sir Charles Lilley on Foundation Day, 28 February, 1883,\textsuperscript{15} the School’s Regulations were approved by the Governor-in-Council in June 1883 and the building was completed in 1884. So after nine tumultuous years, the Brisbane Girls Grammar School was now established on its permanent site.

\textsuperscript{14} ibid., p. 135.
\textsuperscript{15} “The Honourable S.W. Griffith, on behalf of the Brisbane Girls’ Grammar School Trustees requested Sir Charles Lilley to lay the stone … He then presented a mallet and silver trowel to Sir Charles, asking him to keep them as a remembrance of the day … The mallet will be appropriately inscribed and on the trowel will be the following: Presented by the trustees of the Brisbane Girls’ Grammar School to the Hon Sir Charles Lilley, KC, the Chief Justice of Queensland, on the occasion of his laying the foundation stone of the school, February 28, 1883. Sir Charles then placed in a jar the local papers of the day, coins of the present reign, and a scroll bearing the following: Nil sine labore. The Brisbane Girls’ Grammar School was first opened in March, 1875, as a branch of the boys’ foundation, and it was conducted in a house on Wickham Terrace rented from Hon. John Douglas. As its members grew and its popularity increased, an effort was made to raise the subscriptions necessary to obtain for it a separate endowment of £1,000 per annum under the Grammar Schools Amendment Act of 1865. This was accomplished in the middle of 1882, and the foundation stone of this building was laid by his Honour Sir Charles Lilley, Chief Justice of Queensland, on Wednesday February 28, 1883.”

“The woman’s cause is man’s, they rise or sink together, dwarfed or Godlike, bond or free.”
TENNYSON’S “Princess” (Brisbane Courier, Thursday 1 March 1883, p. 3)
To become fine SportsWomen

c1885: The Girls Grammar School photographed from Gregory Terrace