



Friends of the

Old Teachers' College, Armidale Inc.

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Patrons: T.G. (Gus) Plater and R.F. (Rod) Davis OAM

Vale: Gwenda Shannon

It is with a great deal of sadness that I wish to inform you that our inaugural President Gwenda Shannon OAM, who was the founder of the Friends of the Old Teachers' College, passed away in Newcastle on 3 April 2018 after a short illness.

Graham Wilson (Vice President of FOTC)

OBITUARY FOR GWENDA SHANNON OAM

9th May 1934 – 3rd April 2018



Gwenda was born in 1934 and had a happy childhood, growing up in Brisbane with her mother and sister Pam, her father having died when she was two. Times were hard, but Gwenda looked back on her childhood with a positive, upbeat attitude.

She finished school, went to secretarial college and obtained work with the Brisbane City Council at the City Hall. She and her mother enjoyed travel and took the opportunity to embark on a working holiday to Europe, travelling there, as was the norm at that time, by ship.

It was whilst on another trip, a small organised coach tour of the New England area, that Gwenda and her mother discovered Armidale. They liked the area, the city and the cooler climate. As a result, Gwenda applied for and was successful in obtaining a position as secretary to the Registrar at the University of New England and moved to Armidale in 1967 to take up her new role. Despite knowing no-one, slowly and steadily she built a new life and made many friends. She harnessed her interests and beliefs in a way which brought benefit to the wider community.

During her long career at the University until her retirement in 1991, she founded and was president of the Staff Club and set about raising funds for the Club through organising imaginative events such as an 'English Victorian Christmas in July'. As an early member of the fledgling Armidale Zonta Club she took part in their fund-raising and social events up to her retirement.

She believed passionately in the heritage of Armidale and particularly in preserving the Armidale Teachers' College building, vacated following amalgamation of the College with the University of New England. Working together with other like-minded members of a team, the Friends of the Old Teachers' College was established, over which she presided for twenty years. She and the committee set about raising money to ensure not only the restoration and upkeep of the College, but to bring it back to life and use it purposefully.

The 'Friends' fireproofed the building and restored the Auditorium to comply with standards for licencing for public performance, hosted significant public functions and dedicated a War Memorial Room. It is fitting that, last year a room in the College was named after her, the Gwenda Shannon Room, which will remain as a lasting tribute to her commitment and dedication. However, her long-held aim to install a lift in the building has not been achieved in her lifetime.

Anyone who knew Gwenda was aware of her passion for books, music and films, all of which she prodigiously collected and which represented her wide-ranging interests in opera, politics, opera, history and art. She could hold her own conversing on almost any topic and her nieces in England recall their lively phone conversations which included Brexit, and the state of current politics.

Her particular interest in film had an instrumental role when the Capitol Theatre in Armidale closed during the 1980s. She became president of a group known as the 'Friends of the Cinema' and they set about locating different venues in which to continue to show films to the public, which led finally to the Belgrave cinema being established over a decade later.

These same skills were put to good use in helping to get the New England Regional Art Museum up and running. As a founding member of the Art Museum committee she tirelessly raised money to help establish a museum to house the Hinton, Coventry and other collections of art. She organised concerts, festivals, competitions and worked as a volunteer in the museum bookshop for many years, remaining committed to the completed museum for the rest of her life.

Gwenda seemed to have a natural ability to get things done and drive things forward in a way that was not pushy, loud or confrontational. But perhaps the key to her personality was her Christian faith which was central to her life and provided a solid foundation and guide. She loved the little St Mary's Anglican Church in west Armidale and devoted 36 years volunteering as a warden, as well as holding a number of key positions within the church at both local and national levels.

As long-time secretary of the St Peter's Cathedral Parish Anglican Board of Missions Fellowship, she was passionate about raising funds to support its work in countries around the world, particularly Papua New Guinea, the Pacific and South East Asia.

However, Gwenda would be the first to acknowledge that these achievements in the community were all attained through great teamwork rather than to her alone and she was therefore genuinely surprised, thrilled and honoured to be awarded, in 2000, the Armidale Citizen of the Year and in 2003, the Medal of the Order of Australia.

Although Gwenda's achievements were many, her two nieces knew her simply as a loving aunt. Over the years she was a consistent example of principles, good standards and values and how to see the positives in people and situations. She always took an interest in family and friends, never forgot a birthday and was a constant support through good times and bad. She was funny, with a great sense of humour and was a loving and loyal sister to Pam, with whom she shared many happy times and trips abroad.

Gwenda could also be stubborn. In response to the onset of modern technology at work, she remained determined to stick with her old manual typewriter until it was taken away and she was forced to use an electric one. But at home, she remained loyal to the tried and trusted ways of old. There was no mobile phone, no laptop or computer and no answerphone. Instead she remained happily surrounded by her many books and films and persisted in working hard for her various charities and interests, to the end of her life.

Despite her later difficulties with mobility, she always showed a great spirit of cheerfulness and endurance and when she was eventually forced to use a walking stick to get about, she added walking sticks to her many collections!

But above all, Gwenda had a natural gift to get on with people from all walks of life and in the process, changed society for the better. She was a special lady.

Compiled by her family and friends

FUTURE OF THE COLLEGE

The Friends of the Old Teachers' College are still waiting on a final determination concerning the future of the College building. The University of New England has certainly relinquished its role as Trustee of the building and we are aware that discussions are taking place between the Lands Department and other parties. We will inform you of any new development.

Graham Wilson OAM (Vice President of FOTC)

MEMBERSHIP

We welcomed a number of new members this year but sadly we also farewelled a number of long-term members who will be greatly missed.

We would love ideas for boosting our dwindling numbers. I'm thinking blackmail but you may be able to come up with something that is less criminal – please tell.

Your support, as ever, is much appreciated and we thank you most sincerely.

Lorraine McNamara

HISTORY ROOM REPORT

With gratitude to our dedicated group of volunteers, we are able to ensure our History and Gwenda Shannon Rooms are open to visitors from 2 to 4pm each weekday. Unfortunately some Committee members are coping with illness, either their own or that of a family member or both, and volunteers have taken on extra days to help out during this difficult period. We would like to extend our sincere THANK YOU to them. While we have not been inundated with requests for weddings or reunions to be held at the college, we do have a wedding booking for August and a reunion for October. Brian Hawkins is organising this reunion for the 1956-57 Session. Brian has asked that we advertise the following details in this Newsletter:

- Date of reunion - Tuesday 9th and Wednesday 10th of October.
- Meet and Greet - From 11.30am, 9.10.18 at Armidale City Bowling Club.
- Don Firth will send out more details later.
- If attending contact Brian BEFORE September 30th on 02 44218080 after 6pm, please.
- Cost \$15 to cover incidentals.

We are happy to advertise any reunion whether in Armidale or elsewhere. Also, we like to receive a brief report and maybe a photo from reunions as we know our members are interested in what other sessions are doing. Two people called into the College on their way to the 1957-58 Session in Port Macquarie held on April 10 and 11. Maurie Doohan and Ken Dransfield from Casino called in to view their session photo hanging in the front corridor on the first floor with the many other session groups. They also took time to view the Gwenda Shannon Room which had not been established before their previous visit. We hope that those who attended this reunion in Port Macquarie had a great time renewing friendships and reminiscing.

Karen Marshall and Sue Melville

Anzac Day Service

Jenny Richards and Bev Korsch attended the Anzac Day Ceremony on the University Campus and laid a wreath on your behalf in memory of all 68 staff and ex-students who died in World War 2. The names and details of the following were read out:

Anzac Day (UNE) 2018

7. ROY VINCENT BOND Flight Sergeant RAAF. Killed following his plane crashing into the English Channel on anti-submarine duty North West of Bordeaux. He was aged 23.
8. GEORGE WYLIE CLARK Corporal Signaller AIF. Died of illness as Prisoner of War working on the Thai-Burma railway. He was aged 37.
9. JAMES NEVILLE DAVIS Flight Sergeant RAAF. Killed when plane crashed near Milne Bay, New Guinea. He was aged 20.
10. GEORGE WYLDE EVANS Lance Corporal RAAF. Killed in Action when defending an Observation Post in New Guinea. He was aged 21.
11. JAMES GILLELAND Captain AIF. Died of illness in action in New Guinea. He was aged 29.
12. GORDON JOHN HOCKEY Flying Officer RAAF. Killed in aircraft accident Cleveland Bay, Queensland on operational flight. He was aged 27.



Vale: Elwyn Sydney (Jock) Elphick

The Armidale history community lost a true friend, Elwyn Sydney (Jock) Elphick on 25 November 2017. He was born in Lismore on 12 April 1931 and his parents were share-farmers with dairy cows. He attended Casino High School between 1944 and 1948 where he was a prefect and school captain.

He attended the University of New England from 1949 to 1952 and gained his Bachelor of Arts and a Diploma of Education. It was during that time that he developed his love of the classics, Australian History and the English language.

His first appointment was to Macksville High School where he met his devoted wife, Pat. They married in 1956 and she shared his loves and the lives of their four children for sixty-two years. On promotion he was transferred to Narrandera High School as English and History Master.

In the early 1970s, the family moved to Wagga Wagga where Jock lectured at the Teachers' College and studied for his Master of Literature. In time he was to transfer to Armidale Teachers' College where his particular interests were Social Science Education, Local History and the role of Museums in Education.

In 1979, he spent a sabbatical year at London University studying the use of museums in education. Apart from his lecturing at Armidale Teachers' College, he became the Director of the New England Historical Resources Centre following the retirement of Dr Lionel Gilbert.

During his time at the College, he published many papers and books. One of these being a comprehensive history of Armidale Teachers' College titled *The College on the Hill: A History of Armidale Teachers' College and Armidale College of Advanced Education 1928 – 1989*. He also contributed significantly to the Armidale Historical Society and the New England Regional Art Museum (NERAM) because of his love of local history and Howard Hinton.

Scott's Head was an important part of Jock and Pat's life where they had purchased an early holiday home. On retirement from Armidale College of Advanced Education, they went to live at Scott's Head and he and Pat pursued many interests, travelling, fishing, bird watching and gardening to name a few.

Although towards the end of his life when Jock's health deteriorated, he and Pat moved to the Central Coast, he kept his unflinching sense of humour and stoicism and showed total devotion to Pat and his family.



Graham Wilson OAM and Roslyn Townsend OAM