

Fidelis

ISSUE 64

DECEMBER 2023



MERIDEN
AN ANGLICAN SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

Meriden girls
make their *marks*.

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Front cover: Meriden's production of the musical *Annie* at the Concourse Theatre, Chatswood, 30 March – 1 April 2023

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Thank you to the staff and students who provided photos for this issue

2023 has been a wonderful year with so many remarkable achievements to celebrate.

As you browse the pages of *Fidelis* you will read about brilliant performances in the musical production of *Annie*, amazing science accolades in world leading competitions, incredible sporting feats for individuals and teams at the international level and wonderful community building activities uniting Meriden Old Girls and current students.

I am often asked what makes Meriden so special. My answer is that we have a wonderful balance between the 'crucial quartet': academic excellence, pastoral care, cocurricular opportunities and a deep rooted and embedded Christian foundation. In the following pages you will see wonderful examples of how this balance is lived out every day at Meriden. The breadth of experiences and opportunities available to girls at Meriden is quite astounding and only seems to increase with each year. But these experiences and opportunities would not be available if not for the wonderful staff who so generously and passionately contribute to the fabric of this school. I am enormously grateful to the staff for the opportunities they support for our girls.

In my first year as Principal of Meriden I can say that it has been an absolute joy to lead this school. I feel honoured and humbled to follow in the footsteps of such wonderful women who have gone before me. In this edition of *Fidelis* you will read about extraordinary achievements by the girls but there are also many 'ordinary' moments of joy each day at Meriden. Fun Prefect initiatives at lunchtime, locker decorating for a girl's birthday, Year 4 students excitedly sharing their favourite characters from 'The Babysitters Club' book series and cringy jokes in assembly are all moments which have made me smile (or even laugh out loud) this year. I am grateful for both the ordinary and extraordinary moments at Meriden.

However, there was also sadness this year as we mourned the passing of Mrs Denise Thomas AM. Mrs Thomas was the beloved eighth Principal who

led the School from 1985 – 2002 and again in 2006. Her passing resulted in an outpouring of grief and acknowledgement from her former students and staff. Many reflected on her educational leadership, her wisdom and her kindness.

Mrs Thomas was considered an energetic and innovative Principal who quickly grasped the ethos of Meriden. She was a teacher of History, English, General Studies and Divinity and continued in the classroom at Meriden until the demands of administration became too great. Throughout her time at Meriden, Mrs Thomas oversaw significant development in areas of the curriculum. She introduced new subjects such as Commerce and Asian languages and she ensured the teaching of Music was given greater depth and breadth. A sign of the times, Mrs Thomas oversaw the

FROM THE Principal

introduction of technology and computers at the School, including the first dedicated computer room containing eighteen networked computers.

Mrs Thomas was a woman of deep personal faith. The spiritual life of the School was central to her, and it was her wish to develop young women of substance and faith. Most importantly, Mrs Thomas was a people person who cared deeply for her students and staff. The warmth and affection with which she was held have been reflected in the outpouring of messages mourning her loss. We grieve her passing and give thanks to our Lord for her life and her outstanding service to education.

As my first year as Principal draws to a close I would like to thank the Meriden community for their unwavering support. I hope you enjoy *Fidelis*.



MRS LISA BROWN
Principal

MIKAYLA RODGER WITH
MERIDEN'S HEAD OF SCIENCE,
MRS TARA RICHARDS

"The experience has opened my eyes to the vast world that science has to offer and I hope that I can continue my research into improving the design of my project."

—MIKAYLA RODGER

Mikayla wins Australian Stockholm Junior Water Prize

Year 10 student **MIKAYLA RODGER** won the 2023 Australian Stockholm Junior Water Prize in April for her research into cyanobacteria, a microorganism responsible for an irreversible decline in water quality around the world. Mikayla is the second Meriden student to win this challenge where students propose solutions to global water problems.

Mikayla developed an eco-friendly and affordable system to prevent cyanobacteria bloom in dams on farms, using a solar-powered machine to reduce cyanobacteria blooms by circulating, oxygenating and filtering a body of water.

"The impact of cyanobacteria is so immense that it can even be observed from space," said Mikayla.

"Cyanobacteria blooms are growing in severity, not just within Australia but around the world. The combination of floods and nutrient runoff after a drought fuels blooms which produce toxins harmful to humans, livestock and wildlife," she said.

Mikayla's invention could significantly reduce the environmental impact of cyanobacteria blooms. She was invited to present her project at the Australian Stockholm Junior Water Prize after the project came second in the Innovations and Engineering Design Years 9 – 10 category at the STA NSW Young Scientist Awards.

In August, Mikayla travelled to Stockholm to compete against students from over thirty countries in the international final. During her time there she met Crown Princess Victoria of Sweden who is patron of the award.

"I enjoyed presenting my invention on a global stage and meeting other students from around the world who share my passion for science and innovation," said Mikayla, who says she has always been fascinated by science.

"For me, science is a vessel for discovery. I get to learn about how things work and apply it to the world around me. Science allows me to question, explore

and uncover. It provides results that can help to develop solutions to some of the world's greatest challenges," said Mikayla.

"I believe it is important for young women to become more involved in STEM, pursue their interests and strive to make real change in the world around them."

The award has opened many doors for Mikayla as a young woman in STEM; in August she was invited to speak at the Australia and New Zealand Cyanobacteria Workshop at Monash University, Melbourne.

"At the workshop I met people involved in similar projects in water research across Oceania as well as CSIRO representatives who discussed opportunities for grant agreements," Mikayla said.

She was also invited to speak at National Water Week in October.

"Holistically, the experience has opened my eyes to the vast world that science has to offer and I hope that I can continue my research into improving the design of my project."

Meriden cadet leads TGSACU to historic victory

In June, the Trinity Grammar School Army Cadet Unit (TGSACU) won the 2023 Combined Associated Schools Drill Competition following months of rigorous preparation, ably led by Year 12 Meriden student, WO1 Sophie Brennan (RSM).

The milestone win is the Unit's first-ever victory in the highly-competitive annual CAS Drill Competition, and the first time in the competition's twenty-one-year history where a female cadet assumed leadership of the winning unit.

"The squad worked very hard in the lead-up to the competition. The commitment and perseverance shown by cadets in the TGSACU are what makes the Unit so special," said Sophie.

"When entrusted with a task, the cadets wholeheartedly set their minds to it and dedicated themselves to its completion, striving to deliver their best. It was extraordinary to be able to see that all our hard work paid off."

"The cadets were well prepared for the competition," said CAPT (AAC) Fiona Brennan, Meriden's Coordinator of Cadets.

"Their outstanding performance, characterised by twenty-six flawlessly executed manoeuvres, left a lasting impression on the judges."

The competition aims to foster camaraderie and healthy competition between CAS Army Cadet units while reinforcing the importance of drill, dress and bearing within each unit.

"Events such as the CAS Drill Competition allow cadets from different companies to come together and form bonds with those with whom they would not normally spend much time. They also provide opportunities to meet and interact with cadets from other units, while improving their leadership skills," said Sophie.



Top: WO1 Sophie Brennan (centre) with fellow cadets CUO Surabhi Govind, CUO Adelaide Loane and CUO Zoe Wang

Inset: The TGSACU squad which won the Combined Associated Schools Drill Competition

Meriden cadets in the 2023 CAS Drill Competition were: WO1 Sophie Brennan, CPL Jeannette Chen, SGT Andrea Cheng, CPL Melody Chia, SGT Aanya Gupta, CPL Punyashree Khan, CPL Olivia Lee, CPL Angelina Le-Lo, CPL Violet Loane, WO2 Kayla Molesworth, CPL Parneet Sandhu, WO2 Cassandra Seeto, SGT Rachel Xie and SGT Rita Yeung. Reserves were: CPL Anjana Kailasanathan and CPL Hannah Lui.

STANDING OVATION FOR MERIDEN'S PRODUCTION OF

Annie

The cast, crew and orchestra members of Meriden's Senior School musical production *Annie* received a resounding standing ovation for their performance over three nights in the beautiful Concourse Theatre, Chatswood.

1 Evangeline Lee as Miss Hannigan and Orphans Maddy Wood, Arshia Nanda, Corrine Xu, Vienna Korkis, Dahlia Toovey, Grace Vaux and Hannah Yu

2 Nerissa Du as Mr Bundle

3 Anastasia Ibrahim as Annie and Pepper as Sandy



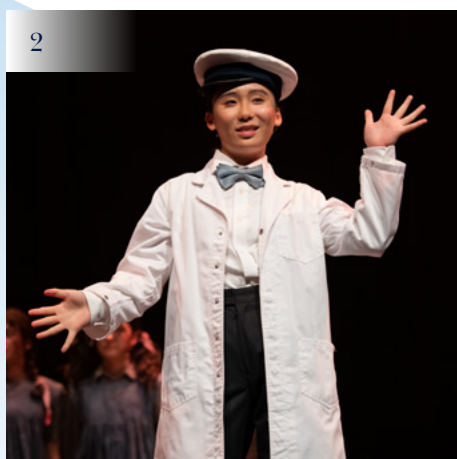
Set in New York City in the midst of the Great Depression, the cast of sixty-six Meriden students performed the classic story of orphan Annie with its powerful, optimistic message that "the sun will come out tomorrow".

Beginning with the opening trumpet call of the iconic melodic theme heralding bright and energetic musical numbers, the audience was treated to sentimental and captivating performances by Meriden students in classic Broadway style.

Annie's message of hope appealed to Meriden's Performing Arts staff following the global pandemic, and its large ensemble cast meant more girls gained experience performing in a professional theatre.

"From the vast array of larger-than-life characters to the comedic and heart-warming script, the historical context and iconic score, we have treasured every moment of *Annie*," said Ms Annemaree McLeod, Production Director, who said she was proud of all the students and staff who helped make the show such a triumph.

"It has been a joy to work on this show with such a wonderful and hard-working cast, crew, orchestra and creative team," she said. *Annie* will remain a memorable success amongst the School community for many tomorrows to come.





4 Hoovervillian Ensemble:
Sophie Loane, Chloe Silberman,
Emma Wen, Vanessa Wang,
Nola Wang, Mikhayla Lobo,
Zahara Toomalatai and
Emma Bruce

5 Anastasia Ibrahim as Annie
with the Maid Ensemble

6 Anastasia Ibrahim as Annie and
Gracelyn Yu as Grace Farrell
with the Maid Ensemble

7 NYC Ensemble

8 Grace Shen as Lily St Regis and
Youya Wei as Rooster Hannigan

9 Chloe Silberman as President
Franklin D Roosevelt and
Cabinet members played by
Lucinda Russell, Nikita Garg,
Shiloh Xing, Nola Wang and
Zoe Leeson

10 Anastasia Ibrahim as Annie and
Maddy Wood as Kate

11 Full Cast – Finale



NATALIE SO AND
KARINA BELL TAKE
CONTROL OF A
BOEING 737

Engineering Studies students soar to new heights

Meriden's Engineering Studies students can add pilot training to their list of achievements after a trip to Bankstown Airport where industry experts introduced them to the opportunities available in the field of aeronautical engineering.

The Meriden girls each had an opportunity to take control of a Boeing 737 aircraft in a state-of-the-art simulator, following a lesson from the Head Flight Instructor at Sydney Flight College on flight control fundamentals, including how to maintain the correct altitude and perform ground and aerial navigation.

The students performed smooth take-offs, graceful landings, and even advanced aerial manoeuvres such as barrel rolls, and received an exclusive tour of a revolutionary new carbon fibre jet which will soon fly dignitaries and politicians around the country.

"The day incorporated a high level of interactivity, and the girls were inspired by experts who stressed the importance of increasing female representation in aviation roles," said Engineering Studies teacher, Mr Jonathan Chan, who accompanied the girls on the excursion which he said was a once-in-a-lifetime learning opportunity for the students.

"I believe that for many of the students, this experience has instilled a sense of confidence to pursue careers in STEM fields," he said.

"The highlight of the excursion was flying the flight simulator," said Natalie So, who plans to study engineering (Mechatronics) and commerce following the HSC.

"The replica of the cockpit of a Boeing 737 aircraft combined with the immersive 180-degree screen created a remarkably realistic environment that made it feel as though I was soaring through the sky!" said Natalie.

"Studying engineering helps you to understand why things are built the way they are and how it affects society."

— CHRISTINE MCKENZIE, YEAR 12

Natalie said that Engineering has challenged her critical thinking skills and pushes her to think outside the box.

"I love the hands-on nature of engineering and applying your theoretical knowledge to real-world scenarios. There are also continuous opportunities for learning as the field is constantly evolving with new technologies, techniques and discoveries," she said.

Christine McKenzie, Year 12, agreed, and said: "Studying engineering helps you to understand why things are built the way they are and how it affects society. There are many opportunities to experiment, build your own projects and learn how things work, as well as how they can be improved."



Junior School girls named state swimming champions

Junior School's NSW Relay Team
Champions: Veronica Xu, Jenny Li,
Alice Wu and Liliana Zhou

**"It was wonderful to
see the girls support
and encourage each
other to achieve this
historic milestone."**

—MS BELINDA WILSHER,
JUNIOR SCHOOL SPORT
COORDINATOR

Meriden's Junior School girls were crowned New South Wales 2023 State Champions in April after winning gold in the 4 x 50-metre Freestyle Relay at the NSWPSA Swimming Championships.

The team of **JENNY LI, ALICE WU, VERONICA XU** and **LILIANA ZHOU** won the event by five seconds, helping secure Meriden's best-ever result at the championships.

Standout performances following months of dedicated training saw Jenny Li, Year 5, also place third in the 8 to 10 Years 50-metre Butterfly, while Lucinda Buckley, Year 6, placed equal first in the 12 Years 50-metre Butterfly and finished in third place in the 12 Years 50-metre Backstroke.

"The team performed strongly and delivered an extraordinary display of determination and teamwork on the day. It was wonderful to see the girls support and encourage each other to achieve this historic milestone," said Meriden's Junior School Sport Coordinator, Ms Belinda Wilsher.

Lucinda and Jenny were selected to represent New South Wales at the School Sport Australia Swimming Championships in August. At this event, Jenny placed second in the 10 Years 50-metre Butterfly, and as part of the NSW team, came first in the Mixed 10 Years 200-metre Relay. Lucinda's NSW relay team came second in the 12 Years 200-metre relay.

Another Meriden girl earns coveted spot at Wimbledon

In July, rising tennis star and Year 8 student **JIZELLE SIBAI** competed at the Junior 14 and Under Wimbledon Championships, one of just three Australian players selected to play the Junior Grand Slam tournament. Jizelle followed in the footsteps of Year 9 Meriden student, Giselle Guillen, who competed in the inaugural 14 and Under Wimbledon tournament in 2022 and Violet Apisah (Class of 2018) who competed at Wimbledon in 2017 and 2018.

After months of preparation and rigorous training with Meriden's tennis coaches, Jizelle competed in five matches during the round-robin tournament at the esteemed All England Club, and connected with fellow aspiring players from across the globe.

"Wimbledon is such a prestigious event. I feel honoured to have experienced this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," said Jizelle, who has played tennis for nine years and embraced the full Wimbledon experience, playing tennis on the famed grass courts on which many of her heroes have competed.

"I have always been inspired by these players and now I have played on the same courts as them – it feels amazing," she said.

"I found competing on grass courts tricky at the beginning. However, once I found my groove, I found it suited my game style."

"I love competing. I feel like it brings out the best in me when I play. I have grown up playing tennis with my friends and now I get to travel with them to compete. I am hoping this is just the beginning of my tennis journey," she said.

Thirty-two students from thirteen nations competed at the 14 and Under Championships, and Jizelle was selected to represent Australia after her strong performance at the Margaret Court Cup tournament in January.

Like Violet before them, both Jizelle and Giselle are supported by Meriden's Olympus Program, which provides support to student-athletes in achieving their academic and sporting dreams.



GISELLE GUILLEN
AND JIZELLE SIBAI



"I love music. I love the sound the violin produces, and I enjoy sharing the beautiful music written for violin with the world."

—TERESA YANG

Teresa awarded top Australian music scholarship

Teresa Yang with Meriden's Symphony Orchestra performing Max Bruch's Violin Concert No. 1 in G minor at Sydney Town Hall in December 2023

In November, accomplished violinist **TERESA YANG** won the 2023 2MBS Fine Music Sydney's Young Virtuoso Award, to then compete for the national title in the MBS Network's Young Virtuoso Award's National Finals in Brisbane later in the month.

Teresa's list of extraordinary musical accomplishments includes winning the top prize in the Sydney Eisteddfod NSW Doctors Orchestra Instrumental Scholarship in July with a twenty-five-minute repertoire featuring Tchaikovsky's *Valse-Scherzo*, two movements from Bach's *Partita for Violin No. 2*, and Heifetz's arrangement of Gershwin's *Three Preludes*.

This scholarship, a highlight of the Sydney Eisteddfod program, aims to discover and encourage an outstanding instrumentalist from the fields of strings, woodwind or brass instruments. The competition

saw her compete against musicians who have already commenced their professional careers. Teresa – who began playing violin at age five – will use the scholarship funds to further her musical education.

Her long string of musical successes includes winning the 2023 National Youth Concerto Competition in June, after placing as a finalist the year before; named senior runner-up in the NSW Secondary Schools Concerto Competition; and winning the Melbourne Recital Centre's 2022 Bach Competition and the John Curro National Youth Concerto Competition, and the 2021 Kendall National Violin Junior Category.

"I have pushed myself to improve and reach my potential to become a more mature musician. The NSW Doctors Orchestra Instrumental Scholarship competition was a great learning

experience. I did not anticipate that I would win as I was competing against tertiary students who I admire," said Teresa.

Teresa is a member of Meriden's Amadeus program, which nurtures the talents of skilful young musicians by fostering musical growth, supporting academic endeavours and offering exciting performance opportunities.

"I love music. I love the sound the violin produces, and I enjoy sharing the beautiful music written for violin with the world," said Teresa.

"I hope to pursue a career as a musician at the highest level. I want to do justice to the composers for the work they have done and be able to share the beauty of music with people all over the world."

Water polo players embark on international training tours

During the July school holidays, six of Meriden's finest water polo players joined international training tours in the northern hemisphere to gain experience training and competing on the international stage ahead of the 2024 World Championships. **ALYSSA CHAN, ABIGAIL OATES, CHRISTINA DIGIANDOMENICO** and **KEIRA RIPPON** visited Europe, while **KATE DUFFY** and **SOPHIE PETHERS** toured America.

Year 10 students Alyssa and Abigail toured with the Australian Under 15 Team and competed against the Netherlands and Hungary. "Our trip began in the Netherlands, in a town called Leiden, just outside Amsterdam," said Abigail. "We stayed there for a week and had the opportunity to compete against the National Dutch team and local club teams. Our team achieved fantastic results and emerged undefeated."

"Competing against girls from diverse backgrounds and skill levels was an exciting but challenging experience."

—ABIGAIL OATES

BACK ROW: KEIRA RIPPON, SOPHIE PETHERS AND CHRISTINA DIGIANDOMENICO
FRONT ROW: ALYSSA CHAN, KATE DUFFY AND ABIGAIL OATES



The team then travelled to Hungary where they trained and played in Kecskemet, a town outside Budapest.

The players met influential figures in the water polo world during the tour including meeting Dutch Head Water Polo Coach and former Olympian, Ms Lefke van Belkum, and dining with the captain of the Hungarian National Water Polo Team, Ms Rita Keszthelyi.

“The highlight was meeting girls from other countries as well as amazing players who have represented their counties at the Olympics and other international competitions. They each shared their experiences with us and gave valuable advice,” said Alyssa.

“Experiencing a different intensity and style of water polo also helped to enhance my skills.”

Abigail said feedback and guidance from experienced coaches helped her hone her skills and technique.

“Competing against girls from diverse backgrounds and skill levels was an exciting but challenging experience and adapting to different playing styles pushed me to improve,” said Abigail.

Meriden’s Head Water Polo Coach and former Olympian, Ms Chloe Wilcox, attended the European tour as an Assistant Coach.

“It has been an incredible experience for the girls to see the difference in styles of play in Europe and understand how a country’s culture can influence this,” she said.

“The girls’ energy and excitement to be overseas were lovely to see. Most importantly, they were able to learn and grow as a team both in and out of the pool.”



Budding authors claim top prizes in writing competition

In September, **CLARICE ZHONG**, Year 2, and **KAITLYN XI**, Year 5, won Gold Awards in their respective divisions of the State Library’s WriteOn creative writing competition – both students for the second consecutive year.

In WriteOn, primary school students from across New South Wales write up to 500 words of imaginative text based on a provided photo prompt – this year, an image of camels crossing a desert landscape.

Clarice wrote her poem, *The Day I Stand at the Front of the Line*, while travelling in Japan on a bullet train. The poem depicts an adventurous journey through the outback.

“While on the train, I enjoyed being at the front because of the better view. This gave me the inspiration of a camel being at the front of the line,” said Clarice.

Kaitlyn’s poem, *Follow the Leader*, follows a camel’s arduous trek through rugged terrain, with the narrator yearning to lead

the way and venture beyond the familiar trails, and was inspired by Paul Laurence Dunbar’s poem, *We Wear the Mask*.

“It made me think about pretending and hiding our true thoughts. My poem is written from the perspective of the camel, who pretends to be willing and follows the leader, his master, but really what he wants is freedom,” said Kaitlyn.

“I like writing because you can use your own ideas and imagination. I also like travelling to different places as it gives me a lot of inspiration. When I travel, I write a diary. This helps me come up with ideas,” said Clarice.

“Writing makes me feel free. I can write about whatever I want and express my thoughts and feelings through my words. When I write, it is like playing music; I get to create a world of my own. I also like that I can weave stories from nothing but a blank page and a pencil,” said Kaitlyn.

Clarice and Kaitlyn’s poems were published in *The Best of WriteOn 2023*.



LEXI MODENA AND
AMANDA AMBANAVOS

FIFA finalists inspire the next generation

Like most of Australia, students at Meriden were captivated by the Matilda's success at the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup hosted in Australia and New Zealand in July and August.

Meriden is on the doorstep of Stadium Australia, where so many key games were played, and students enjoyed seeing highlights screened in the lead-up to the finals, sporting yellow and green ribbons as a sign of support.

Many girls joined impromptu lunchtime football games, inspired by our extraordinary national team, and the whole school was delighted when the Matilda's semi-final match with England became Australia's most-watched TV broadcast in history.

Principal Mrs Lisa Brown, interviewed in early August as the finals approached, told *The Guardian*, "I'm really hopeful this will lead to a lasting change for women's sport."

“The FIFA Women’s World Cup gave us an opportunity to spotlight Meriden’s excellent Football program, we have a number of talented players, and it was so inspiring for them to see that the sport has such a bright future,” said Mr Mark Heathcote, Meriden’s Director of Sport.

Year 9 student, Lexi Modena, is hopeful that the high-profile competition will increase the number of girls signing up for the sport, not just at Meriden, but in Australia in general.

“Though at this stage, new players to Meriden’s Football program may not be looking to play at a high level, it is still a great opportunity to keep fit and develop your skills and have fun,” she says.

Amanda Ambanavos, also in Year 9, says that the Matilda’s performance in the FIFA World Cup has already inspired more of her classmates to want to play football for Meriden, and has also changed people’s perceptions of women’s involvement in sport.

“When I would go to watch the Sydney FC Women’s team play at Jubilee Stadium as a little girl, the stadium was never even half full and most of the fans watching would be females,” says Amanda, adding that the Matildas have demolished the stereotype of women’s sport as uninteresting.

“From my family’s perspective, my dad has switched sides, now believing that women play soccer better than men do!” Amanda says.

Lexi started playing football when she was five, and has played for Premier League club APIA Leichhardt for the past six seasons, since joining APIA’s first-ever girls’ team at the age of nine. Her team were this year’s Premiers and runners-up in the Grand Final.

“Growing up, I was surrounded by my dad’s side of the family who loved playing football and watching it,” says Lexi.

She took a year off after playing in a mixed team, then joined a team with friends from school where she played

attack. “After two years in that team I made it into the First Division girls’ team in my age group, where I was pushed back to defence by the coaches.”

She’s played both right and left back during her six seasons at APIA. “I’ve witnessed the club grow so much, whether it was getting promoted through the divisions or growing as a family community,” she says. “This past season, our team really developed. We were able to work together and bring out the best in each other.”

Lexi says that she loves the camaraderie of her team, and enjoys practising something that she can then insert into a game. “It makes me feel really satisfied that my hard work and training is paying off.”

Caitlin Foord is Lexi’s favourite player. “I found it very inspiring watching her attack the space in front of her with no fear,” she says, adding that she loved seeing the Matildas in the FIFA World Cup, whether on her phone on the way to training or when she was able to watch a match live at the stadium.

“The penalty shoot-out against England was the most nail-biting,” she says.

“The main thing I learned from watching the Matildas was that not everyone is perfect, even the top players make mistakes, but it’s how you recover and how hard you work to make up for those mistakes that really matters.”

Amanda, who started playing at age six, made the National Premier League of NSW in 2021 and has played at that level ever since.

“I started training with Sydney Olympic FC, then in 2022 signed a contract with Bankstown City Lions FC – this was the year that made me really understand and define my love for football even more.”

Amanda played for UNSW in 2023, learning more than ever, and has been awarded a position back at Sydney Olympic FC for the 2024 season.

“Teamwork in soccer means that every player has the ability to know each other’s strengths and weaknesses and can make use of each other’s strengths to create a positive atmosphere on the pitch,” she says – adding that football success requires discipline and a strong work ethic, both on and off the pitch.

“Throughout my soccer history, one thing that has helped me both on and off the pitch, is the concept of mind over matter. No matter the circumstance, if you want to achieve a goal, having the right mindset lets you achieve so many things.”

Amanda was thrilled to see three of the FIFA games in person: the opening match in Australia, Matildas vs Ireland, the Matildas vs Denmark in the semi-finals, and the Spain vs England World Cup, and she also watched every other Matildas game on a screen.

She names Steph Catley as her favourite player. “I love how she drives all the way up the field even though she is a defender, showing how much confidence she has in herself, even putting herself out there to score a penalty in the opening match.”

“Watching the Matildas taught me to never give up even if you are losing the game,” says Amanda. “Always have faith that you can still win even if there is little time left.”

“Even the top players make mistakes, but it’s how you recover and how hard you work to make up for those mistakes that really matters.”

—AMANDA AMBANAVOS

Students immerse in Spanish daily life

A group of Year 11 Spanish language students travelled to Spain during the October school holidays, immersing themselves in the language and culture, accompanied by Meriden's Head of Languages, Ms Teresa Alonso-Lasheras, and Miss Charlotte Richards. After exploring the rich history of Spain's capital, Madrid, the girls travelled to Valladolid, where they were warmly welcomed by local families who spent the next twelve days sharing their daily life with their Meriden visitors.

After intensive Spanish lessons each morning, the girls returned to their Spanish homes for a traditional lunch, embracing the custom of siesta. In the afternoons, the students' cultural activities included guided tours of the city and its museums, dancing and cooking classes, and they even attended a live Spanish league soccer game.

Isabella Tapia and Zoe Horvat said staying with a local family provided a unique perspective of life in Spain.

"We were able to immerse ourselves in the Spanish culture – something I have always wanted to do. Our host families were eager to assist us in learning Spanish and promptly corrected any mistakes we made. They also introduced us to traditional Spanish dishes, which were delicious!" said Isabella.

"The local family I stayed with only spoke Spanish, so phrases such as 'Can I help you?' became a part of my everyday vocabulary. It was an unforgettable experience that extended my learning and provided me with a deep insight into the Spanish way of life," said Zoe.

Ms Alonso-Lasheras said: "Students not only improved their language and intercultural understanding, they also gained independence and problem-solving skills. As the girls navigated the streets of Spanish cities, engaged in conversations with locals, and experienced the customs and traditions of the country, they absorbed the language and the essence of life in Spain."

The group took day trips to other picturesque cities like Salamanca and Segovia, further enriching their knowledge of Spanish history, architecture and culture.



1 Kathy Khuu, Isabella Tapia, Eve Glynn, Emma Lubke, Mia Freeman, Zoe Horvat and Imogen Jones celebrating Emma's birthday in the Plaza Mayor in Valladolid

2 The students and Miss Charlotte Richards beneath the famous Roman aqueduct in Segovia

3 Eve and Emma in front of the Medieval castle, Alcázar, in Segovia

4 Emma, Mia, Isabella and Eve in Valladolid waiting to visit the tower of the Cathedral



SELINA WANG, LEAH HAR,
CHANTELLE MA, LAURA
CROXON AND AIYANG WU

Meriden's chess champions

Meriden's chess team secured the coveted title of the state's premier secondary schoolgirls' chess team when they won the NSW Junior Chess League Playoffs in September. In a challenging round of matches, the team of Year 10 students, comprising Laura Croxon as captain, Leah Har, Chantelle Ma, Selina Wang and Aiyang Wu, demonstrated their well-honed analytical skills, strategic thinking and adaptability to outmanoeuvre their opponents and emerge as the new state champions.

The victory earned the team the right to represent New South Wales at the Australian Secondary Girls Schools' Teams Championships held in Adelaide in December. The players were joined by Year 11 student, Kylie Lin, for this high-profile championship which sees the best players from each state compete for the prestigious national title.

Meriden's team displayed unity and determination over five intense rounds, each match lasting up to two and a half hours. The girls' strong and consistent performance while navigating the dynamic challenges of each game was rewarded with a third-place win for the team.

"Our dream was to one day make it to the nationals. Witnessing the growth of the girls, their development as chess players, and seeing them emerge as champions in the Playoffs, was incredible," said team captain, Laura.

"Representing NSW at the nationals was an amazing experience. I feel very fortunate to have had the chance to play against the best girls in the country," she said.

"Each year, we have come closer and closer to this point, and it is exciting that we were able to play in the national competition," said Aiyang.

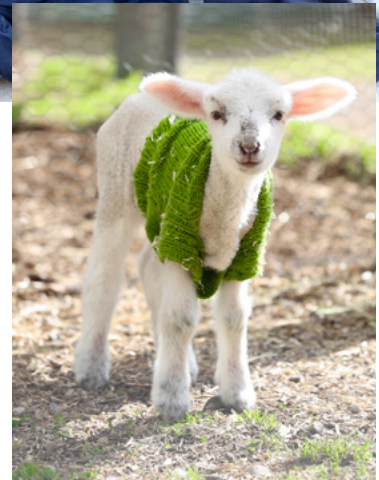
Meriden's Chess Coordinator, Ms Lea Magele, helped prepare the girls for the national tournament, and says it was a once-in-a-lifetime chess experience for the students.

"The national competition gave the team the opportunity to meet top Australian chess players and fellow chess enthusiasts, as well as participate in high-level game analysis," Ms Magele said.

Both Laura and Aiyang agree they have reaped many valuable benefits from competing in chess at Meriden.

"Chess has improved my reaction time and visual cognitive skills and, most notably, it has taught me how to deal with pressure, which is useful for things like exams, music performances or job interviews," said Laura.

"I like how chess is an activity in which anyone can participate, as well as how unpredictable it can be. Chess has helped me develop many skills such as pattern recognition and challenged me to think more critically when making moves," said Aiyang.



- 1 KA students with Mrs Abeynaik at Calmsley Hill City Farm
- 2 Shanina Selvakumar
- 3 Annabelle Mellor

Life on a farm

“Hands-on experiences are the cornerstone of meaningful learning and serve as a powerful tool to reinforce comprehension and skills gained in the classroom.”

—MRS ROBYNNE RONNING
KINDERGARTEN COORDINATOR

Kindergarten students have been exploring the characteristics, needs and wants of living things – and an educational excursion to Calmsley Hill City Farm in August gave them an immersion into farm life. Students had the chance to milk a cow and visit the baby animal nursery, and gave squeals of delight as they interacted with adorable rabbits, chickens, lambs and goats.

The girls were enthralled by various demonstrations that included a working dog show and encounters with camels and alpacas.

“Not only was the excursion engaging and memorable for the students, but the experience also fostered learning and instilled a sense of courage in the girls to embrace new challenges,” said Mrs Robynne Ronning, Kindergarten Coordinator.

“Hands-on experiences are the cornerstone of meaningful learning and serve as a powerful tool to reinforce comprehension and skills gained in the classroom.”



- 4 Sarah Yu
- 5 Emerson Kim
- 6 Liya Golzan and Sarah Yu
- 7 Scarlett Xu
- 8 Agnes Mok
- 9 Emma Pan
- 10 Ailee Kim
- 11 Sahana Ragavan-Iyer and Elora Zhang
- 12 Laura Tang, Annabelle Sleiman and Matilda Huang
- 13 Harper Lin and Mia Armaneous



ANJALI KAILASANATHAN,
SYDNEY NGUYEN, NAOMI RIAZ,
ANJALI POPURI AND
KAITLYN BLAIR

Putting creative, critical and collaborative thinking to the test

Five Meriden girls grappled with complex philosophical concepts to place third overall in the Australasian Philosothon, with three top-five rankings in the national competition, placing second in both Creative Thinking and Critical Thinking, and fifth place in Collaborative Thinking.

The team of **KAITYLN BLAIR**, **ANJALI KAILASANATHAN**, **SYDNEY NGUYEN**, **ANJALI POPURI** and **NAOMI RIAZ** engaged in a series of Community of Inquiry discussions over two days, and were assessed on their listening skills and their ability to constructively build upon or respectfully critique others' viewpoints. Discussion questions included, "Are our subjective experiences just physical, or is there something more to consciousness?", "Should uniforms be gendered?" and "Can anyone be a philosopher?"

Professor Rob Wilson, Chief Judge of the Australasian Philosothon, congratulated the Meriden girls, and said: "The wealth of creative, critical and collaborative thinkers at the school is both a credit to the school and a bright sign for society."

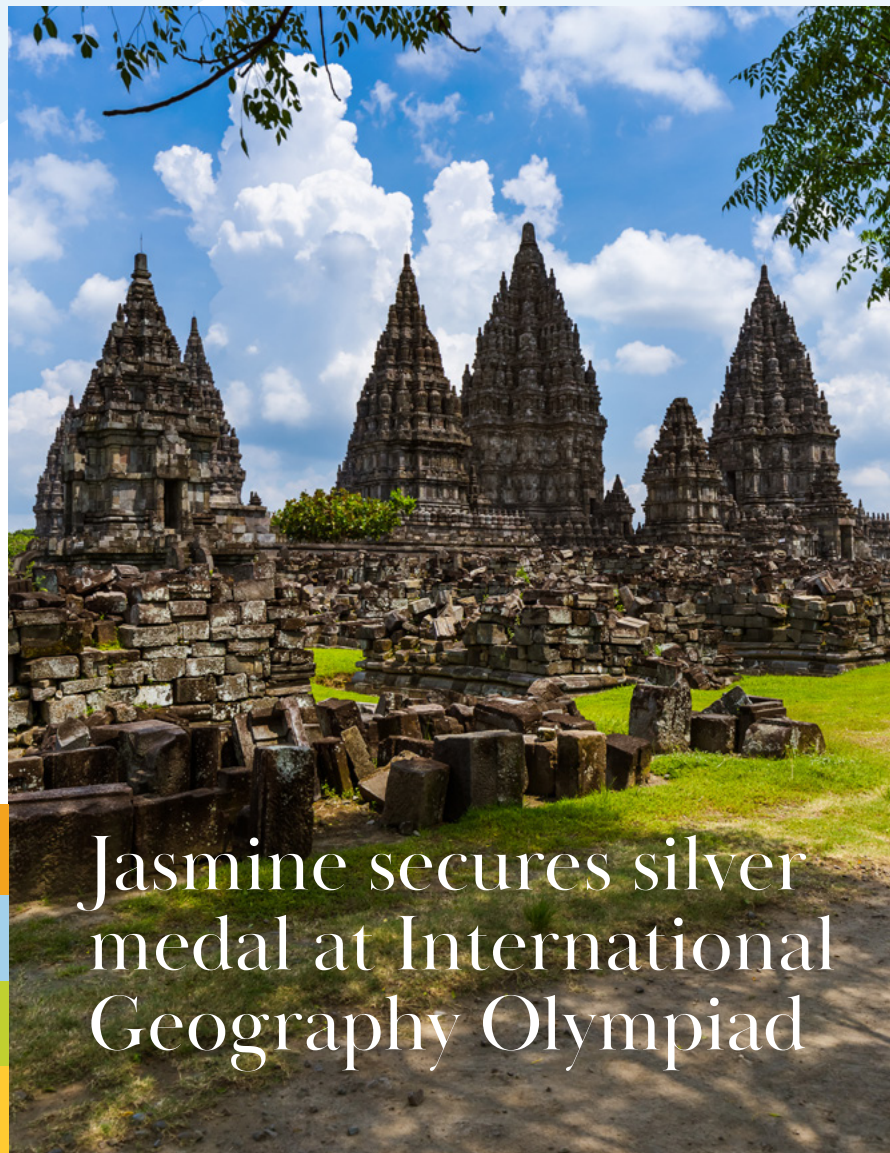
Meriden's Dean of Lateral Learning and Coordinator of Philosophy Club, Ms Priscilla Curran, said participating in the Philosothon enhanced the students' critical and creative thinking skills as well as their capacity to articulate and defend an argument with sound reasoning and justification.

"Most importantly, they have learned the importance of truly listening to others and that it is perfectly acceptable to change their viewpoint throughout a discussion," said Ms Curran.

"I love that there is no definitive 'right answer' in philosophy. We are challenged to think critically and assess the ethical and logical merit of our ideas. For me, this is far more rewarding than just being told if I am right or wrong," said Anjali Popuri.

Anjali Kailasanathan, who was also placed first in the Year 12 Division, said she enjoys studying philosophy because it applies to various fields of knowledge.

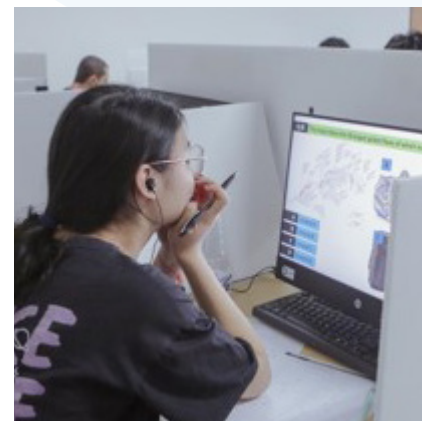
"It allows me to make connections to areas that shape the way people think and perceive the world, such as politics and science," she said.



Jasmine secures silver medal at International Geography Olympiad

“Studying Geography has provided me with a great interdisciplinary approach to understanding the world around me.”

— JASMINE YE



Left: Prambanam Temple, Yogyakarta

Above: Jasmine Ye sitting the Multimedia exam

In August, Year 12 student **JASMINE YE** won a silver medal for Australia at the 2023 International Geography Olympiad, an annual competition for the finest geography students from across the globe, selected to represent their nations from thousands of enthusiastic participants in their respective National Geography Olympiads.

Jasmine competed in Bundang, Indonesia as part of the four-member Australian national team against the brightest young geographers in the world, and faced a tight schedule to prepare for the international competition after concluding her HSC Trial examinations just a day before her departure.

“I felt the pressure of not only representing Australia well academically but also representing our culture and people,” she said.

“Winning a silver medal came as a huge surprise. I really was not expecting much from the competition, so I tried to take the pressure off myself by focusing on making memories and friends.”

The iGeo has three components: a written assessment, a multimedia challenge and extensive fieldwork demanding acute observation skills. Complementing these rigorous tasks are team-based poster presentations, enriching cultural exchanges and ample opportunities for students to acquaint themselves with peers and explore the host city.

The most demanding challenge for Jasmine proved to be the fieldwork, involving eight hours trekking through tropical rainforest to record observations, thoroughly testing her physical and mental endurance.

“The fieldwork examination was definitely the most tiring and challenging. It was a mix of orienteering, physical and human geography. We visited three sites to conduct testing and in between the sites, we were asked to make observations about land use and the impacts of tourism,” said Jasmine.

Team Australia secured fifth place overall and earned four medals: a gold, two silvers and a bronze.

“The experience of being in the company of fellow geographers has enabled me to view the natural and urban world around me with greater analytical insight and perceptiveness. It was amazing to witness Indonesia’s unique landscapes, particularly its volcanoes. It has made me much more appreciative of natural landscapes,” said Jasmine.

“Studying Geography has provided me with a great interdisciplinary approach to understanding the world around me. I am particularly interested in politics and advocacy,” she said.

Jasmine’s career hopes involve helping inform government policy on climate change, environmental conservation and improving quality of life in disadvantaged areas.

Faith, friendship and shared experiences:

MERIDEN'S STUDENT CHRISTIAN GROUP

Meriden has many voluntary, age-specific, student groups who regularly meet at lunchtime to encourage one another, read the Bible, talk about life and pray together. Year 7 student, Lucy Elton, and Year 10 student, Olivia Lee, describe their experiences as members of the School's Student Christian Group.

"SCG has prompted me to think about how I can be an instrument for sharing Christianity with others. "

— OLIVIA LEE

OLIVIA LEE, YEAR 10

—

What typically happens during a Student Christian Group (SCG) catch-up?

At my SCG group, Adelphe, it starts with games and food. One week could be lollipops and guess-what's-in-the-box and the next week could be Kit Kats and trivia. Then we read the Bible – we typically choose a theme or book of the Bible for the term, hear a short talk and engage in discussion with questions or prompts. At the end we pray in small groups about what we have learnt and any other prayer points. Throughout the lunchtime there are also great conversations with other girls and staff.

How has the SCG influenced your personal faith and beliefs?

My personal faith has been strengthened – I am able to see and interact with other Christians in my year group. SCG has also prompted me to think about how I can be an instrument for sharing Christianity with others, to invite and share the Bible with my friends in an accessible and casual setting which can lead to deeper conversations and pathways to youth groups and church.

Describe a particularly meaningful or impactful experience you have had in the group

We made our then-Year 7 SCG leaders a thank-you video (because of covid!) after having them for two years as our discussion group leaders. My time spent with them at SCG and interactions around the school with them made a lasting impact on me.

Another insightful moment for me occurred while having a conversation with one of the Adelphe staff leaders this year. I learned that one of my youth group leaders had recently married her sister! It made me realise how SCG is a link that also strengthens connections and fellowships outside school.

What skills or qualities have you developed through the SCG?

I have gained more theological knowledge and skills in understanding the Bible and its relevance to us; and being surrounded by other Christians has encouraged me to think of how to be more other-focused, developing my personal qualities such as empathy and compassion. I look forward to developing further organisation, initiative and teamwork skills as I become part of the SCG leadership team in 2024.



What advice would you give to students who are considering joining the SCG?

Don't overthink it! If you are curious, or just for the company, food and games, check it out – there is no pressure to stick around. Bring yourself, maybe some friends, and an open mind and heart. We'd love to see you.

LUCY ELTON, YEAR 7

What typically happens during a SCG catch-up?

SCG is super fun! We get to play games, eat snacks and learn about God from His word, the Bible.

How has the SCG influenced your faith and beliefs?

Every week I get to relate and chat to other Christian girls my age. At Meriden I have heaps of people with whom I can talk to about God and life as a Christian in general, which is super cool and rare in many places.

Describe a particularly meaningful or impactful experience you have had in the group

At the end of our discussion we share prayer points and then we all pray for each other. It's a real highlight of my week, especially while going through a hard time like exam week or things at home.

What skills or qualities have you developed through your involvement in the SCG?

SCG has made me better at making friends and connections and getting better at talking and interacting with others. SCG has also helped me to get better at reading the Bible and learning how to understand it.

What advice would you give to students who are considering joining the SCG?

It can be really hard to stand up and go to SCG but even if it seems uncool or if you forget - you can always arrive late whatever the reason - try to find the motivation to come to SCG every week.

Christina's work shortlisted in prestigious international competition

Year 9 Meriden student, **CHRISTINA ZHOU**, was shortlisted for the highly competitive John Locke Essay Writing Competition, which attracts submissions from talented students globally and is known for its rigorous judging process, which is overseen by senior academics from the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge.

Christina discovered the competition while exploring academic opportunities at Oxford University online and saw this as an opportunity to challenge herself.

"I have always enjoyed writing and recording my thoughts, whether it is imaginary fantasy stories, daily diaries, or researching topics of interest. In this case, researching a subject I enjoy – History – motivated me to enter the competition," said Christina.

Her essay explored successful and unsuccessful social movements through a historical lens. "I argue there is no specific set of standards to guarantee the absolute success of a movement when initiating change. However, we can learn from the experience of pioneers to increase the probability of a movement's success. Their strong driving force for social progress has played a pivotal role in shaping our contemporary society," said Christina.

Christina's essay was enhanced by her study of the novel *Oodgeroo – Bloodline to Country* by Sam Watson during her English classes this year, which grapples with the complex dynamic between forceful protest and peaceful advocacy.

"I have always enjoyed writing and recording my thoughts, whether it is imaginary fantasy stories, daily diaries, or researching topics of interest."

— CHRISTINA ZHOU



A Christmas celebration



In a joyous finale to their first year at Meriden, Pre-Kindergarten students delighted their audiences with a heartwarming celebration of Christmas. Through song, dance and choreographed movements, the girls recounted the story of the first Christmas and those who journeyed from afar to witness the birth of Jesus.



SPORTING BRILLIANCE:

Meriden girls shine in diverse sports

While Meriden is renowned for its achievements in tennis, badminton, athletics and water polo, some Meriden girls are busy making their mark in unconventional sports such as taekwondo, figure skating and ultimate frisbee.

DORIS XIA



Meriden's rising taekwondo stars

In July, Year 10 student **DORIS XIA** was awarded a bronze medal at the Oceania World Taekwondo Australian Open Championships in the fiercely competitive Individual Female 59-Kilogram section. Over the past two years, Doris has achieved an impressive medal tally of four gold, one silver and three bronze medals. Doris began competing in taekwondo at the age of eleven, balancing her school commitments with her advanced training regime of up to four days a week

“Taekwondo enables me to improve myself not only physically but also mentally. Competing has taught me how to persevere and not give up until the last second. I am very grateful for the growth that taekwondo has brought me,” said Doris.

To prepare for each competition, Doris's coaches provide her with meticulous pre-match preparation, in-match coaching and after-match analysis, and her two-hour training sessions include daily exercises, training drills and flexibility training.

In 2021, she won gold medals at the Budo South Invitation Tournament and the Nzuta Open Taekwondo Championship, a gold medal at the Taekwondo New Zealand National Championship and the World Taekwondo Tahiti Open, and a silver medal at the World Taekwondo President Cup. Doris also won a bronze medal at her first competition in Australia, the Sydney Taekwondo Festival.

Doris hopes to compete for the Australian Taekwondo Team one day and dreams of participating in the Australian Olympic training program.

“I hope to represent Australia in more international-level competitions. At the same time, I hope to continue to balance study and training to achieve excellent academic results while fulfilling my taekwondo dream,” said Doris.



DANIELLE KIM



AARYA AND
AAHANA PANDEY

Meanwhile, more Meriden girls are poised to emulate Doris' achievements in this sport. In July, Year 7 student, **DANIELLE KIM**, clinched victory at the Taekwondo State Championship, securing gold medals in both the Individual and Pair competitions. In October, sisters **AARYA** and **AAHANA PANDEY**, in Years 5 and 3 respectively, showcased their skills on the national stage at the Australian Taekwondo Championships, with Aarya winning a bronze medal and Aahana claiming a commendable fifth place in her division.

“I hope to represent Australia in more international-level competitions. At the same time, I hope to continue to balance study and training to achieve excellent academic results while fulfilling my taekwondo dream.”

— DORIS XIA



TRISHA TONG

Trisha wins bronze at international figure skating competition

Early mornings spent on the ice have paid off for Year 10 student, **TRISHA TONG**, who won a bronze medal for Australia in May at the Oceania International Figure Skating Competition, held in Auckland, New Zealand, an annual competition showcasing talented figure skaters from all corners of the globe.

Trisha's passion for figure skating began at the age of six, and she now trains on average two hours before school each day, hitting the ice rink at 5:30am.

"I love the feeling of landing a new jump and the freedom when I glide across the ice. There is so much to learn in the world of figure skating; you are constantly presented with new challenges," said Trisha.

"I am incredibly honoured to have opportunities to represent my country and connect with other top young figure skaters from around the world."

Trisha credits Meriden's Olympus Program for elite student-athletes for helping her development and to continue her rigorous training regime.

"The program has had a positive impact on both my mindset and performance as an athlete. Training sessions in Meriden's fitness centre allow me greater flexibility to study. I have also learnt many techniques to enhance my performance, such as visualisation, breathing drills and positive affirmations," said Trisha.

Trisha was also named the 2020 Advanced Novice State Champion, and placed third in the 2021 Advanced Novice Hollins Trophy and the 2022 Junior State Figure Skating Championships.



"There is so much to learn in the world of figure skating; you are constantly presented with new challenges."

— TRISHA TONG



“Ultimate frisbee has no referees, even at the highest level. Instead, there is a communal honour code called the “Spirit of the Game”. This is about taking ownership for when you break a rule and practising good sportsmanship.”

— ELISSA FRENEY

Elissa to represent Australia in ultimate frisbee

Year 9 student **ELISSA FRENEY** recently captained the New South Wales Team at the Australian Youth Ultimate Frisbee Championships to a second-place finish. She has since been selected for the Under 20s Australian national representative team, Southern Terra, which will compete in the 2024 World Junior Ultimate Championships in Birmingham, England.

Ultimate frisbee, often simply referred to as “ultimate,” is a non-contact team sport played with a flying disc (frisbee). It combines elements of football, soccer and basketball, but with a unique set of rules that emphasise sportsmanship and fair play. The objective of ultimate is for one team to pass the disc among their players while advancing towards the opposing team’s end zone, ultimately catching the disc in the end zone to score a point.

Elissa was introduced to the sport by her parents, both accomplished ultimate players since 1997 who competed at world club level. She began participating in youth camps and leagues from the age of ten and said she finds joy in the camaraderie and sportsmanship that define the sport.

“Ultimate frisbee has no referees, even at the highest level. Instead, there is a communal honour code called the “Spirit of the Game”. This is about taking ownership for when you break a rule and practising good sportsmanship. At the end of a game, teams will give each other a “spirit score” which is typically considered as important as the actual score. This means most frisbee players are very respectful and kind people,” said Elissa.

Her training involves consistent throwing sessions, individual strength and fitness work, as well as league games to hone her game sense. Elissa hopes to represent Australia and compete on the international stage.

A TRIBUTE TO

Mrs Denise Thomas AM

The passing of our eighth Principal, Mrs Denise Thomas, in June this year deeply saddened the entire Meriden community.

Mrs Thomas led the School with her intelligence, wisdom and warmth for over eighteen years from 1985 until 2002 and again in 2006. She was an energetic and innovative leader whose vision for Meriden saw the School flourish during her tenure.

From the earliest days of her principalship, Mrs Thomas focused on quality teaching and learning. She expanded the curriculum introducing a variety of new subjects including Business Studies, Drama, Design and Technology and wider language offerings. With an emphasis on individual growth, learning pathways were provided for all girls with both special needs and extension work available. Indeed, Meriden was one of the first schools to introduce strategies for gifted students with the introduction of the Parnassus program in 1992.

The imparting of values was also central to Mrs Thomas' educational vision with her hopes for her students going far beyond academic success. In her final address to the Class of 1991 at their Valet Dinner she said, *"My hope is that your years at Meriden have taught you...to cherish a strong sense of your role as a woman; to believe in your capacity to influence our society for good; to live relationships creatively and lovingly and to be just and compassionate as God asks of us all."*

The religious life of the School was central under Mrs Thomas' leadership. A person of deep personal faith she appointed Meriden's first full-time Chaplain in 1995, strengthened Chapel by encouraging the involvement of students and staff and introduced a Community Service program to allow students to live out their faith in the wider community.

The importance of the cocurricular program in developing well-rounded, confident and resilient young woman was also key for Mrs Thomas. Sports offerings were broadened, new musical groups and programs developed, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme was revitalised whilst annual drama and musical productions became the norm.

Mrs Thomas was also highly active in wider educational circles throughout her tenure as Principal. She was a member of the Australian College of Educational Administrators from 1987, she represented the Association of Independent Schools



1 Mrs Thomas at a Chapel Service in 1997

2 Mrs Thomas with Kindergarten students on their first day at Meriden in 1993

3 Mrs Thomas with her husband, Chris Thomas, and the Right Reverend Robert Forsyth, Bishop of South Sydney, at Mrs Thomas' farewell service at St Andrew's Cathedral in 2002



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MRS DENISE THOMAS AM



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4 Mrs Thomas with a Junior School student during a Chapel Service

5 Mrs Thomas with senior students in 1993

6 Mrs Thomas in 1997 with her Executive team, Mr Tom Dorey, Mrs Jan Nash, Mrs Fran Fleeton and Mrs Judith Poole

7 Mrs Thomas cutting the ribbon at the opening of the Independent Learning Centre in 1998

8 Mrs Thomas speaking with a student during a Hospitality class

on the Ministerial Advisory Committee for the Teaching of Gifted and Talented Children, and she held positions of office in the Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia including Chair of the New South Wales branch from 1994 – 1995. She remained at the forefront of educational debate writing on many issues of the day including how classrooms were changing with the impact of technology, the need for the professional development and care of teachers and the implications of globalisation, with this last point leading her to establish several exchange programs with overseas schools.

Although Mrs Thomas will certainly be remembered for overseeing achievements in the academic, pastoral and cocurricular spheres, it is the personal dimension to her leadership which was

so significant. She knew every girl by name, sought to mentor and support both staff and students and often sat quietly and chatted with individuals who were going through tough times. These are the memories of the community from her time as Principal of Meriden, and the overwhelming response of past staff and students across social media to the news of her death clearly reinforce them. So many students recalled Mrs Thomas' kindness, grace, generous heart and humility. They remembered an inspirational leader and mentor who one Old Girl described as "a wonderful guiding light".

Quite simply, Mrs Thomas was a remarkable Principal and person. We thank God for the gift of Mrs Thomas and her service to the education of young women.

President's Message

KYLIE KAPELERIS (2004)



The Meriden Old Girls' Union (OGU) has had another successful year, and I am proud of our committee's ongoing efforts to serve the OGU network. The OGU continues to foster connections: a connection to our own experiences and memories of our time at Meriden; a connection to fellow Old Girls and the shared memories that bind us; and a connection to the School and the current students whom we welcome to our network each year.

It is a privilege for us to serve on this committee and we look forward to welcoming more Old Girls to our community.

I am pleased to announce a new and larger committee for 2023/24 and thank them for their efforts and support throughout the year.

We would like to extend a warm welcome to Mrs Lisa Brown, who has taken on the role of Principal. Many Old Girls have fond memories of Mrs Brown from their time at Meriden, and we are excited about working with her to further expand the OGU.

Our Annual General Meeting took place on 9 June 2023 at the Blue Ocean Equities Boardroom which offered breathtaking views of Vivid Sydney. The AGM provided a wonderful opportunity for reconnection. Facilitated by Nikki Kelso (Class of 1996), the event featured a presentation from Sanushka Mudaliar (Class of 1996). Since leaving Meriden, Sanushka has pursued studies in Arts/Law at the University of Sydney and worked at Oxfam Australia. She then moved to Cambodia to work for Women's Agenda for Change and later moved to China, where she joined the Association for Women's Rights in Development. She has since worked on various research projects, studied international migration policy, and served as a consultant for United Nations agencies, ASEAN, and the African Union. In 2021, Sanushka accepted the role of founding director of the Red Cross Red Crescent Global Migration Lab.

Back to Meriden Day was held on 26 August, and was a success with almost 100 Old Girls attending. The day began with a Chapel Service, followed by tours of the School and lunch in the beautiful Greenhalgh Centre for Music and Drama, where Old Girls had the opportunity to catch up and reminisce. We would like to congratulate all the cohorts who celebrated reunion milestones, and we look forward to seeing everyone again next year. Special thanks to Irene Karantonis (Class of 1994), Rev Clayton Moss, Mrs Lisa Brown, and the Year 10 Ambassadors for their contributions to this wonderful day.

This year, the OGU mourned the loss of Mrs Denise Thomas AM. The funeral of Mrs Thomas took place at St Andrew's Cathedral, where numerous Old Girls, families and staff gathered to bid our final farewell.

- 1 Annual General Meeting of the OGU
- 2 Nikki Kelso (1996) and Sanushka Mudaliar (1996) at the AGM

OGU Committee

KYLIE KAPELERIS (2004)

President

BILLIE LOTTEY (1980)

Treasurer

NIKKI KELSO (1996)

Secretary

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

IRENE KARANTONIS (1994)

MARINA MITREVSKI (2000)

HERMIONE KIDD (1980)

ANEESHA SATYENDRA (2012)

ANIKA KULENDRAN (2008)

NATALYA RODRIGO (2000)

ANNA LINFIELD-KENT (2014)

CASSANDRA PENROSE (2014)

AMY TAYLOR (2015)

BIANCA ASLANBAS (2004)

CARLA GAGLIANO (2000)

JESSICA MELDRUM (1996)



At Back to Meriden Day, the OGU organised a special tribute to Mrs Thomas, led by Natalya Rodrigo, Danielle Le Ray and Jane Killingsworth (Class of 2000). During this event, Old Girls came together to share their cherished memories of Mrs Thomas. It was heartwarming to hear many Old Girls express how deeply Mrs Thomas had influenced their time at Meriden, emphasising her nurturing nature, love, dedication and unwavering commitment. The Old Girls' community is immensely grateful for her extraordinary service to Meriden and the invaluable role she played in shaping our education. The collective reminiscences shared by Old Girls on various social media platforms were filled with heartfelt tributes, but one quote stood out, perfectly capturing the essence of all the memories shared.

"It was a privilege to have known Mrs Thomas. She remembered everyone, knew us by name and respected every girl and their talents. A great educator of young girls, and her influence will live on for generations."

We also had the honour of attending the Pre-K/ Kindergarten to Year 12 Dinner, where we presented the girls with embossed Bibles, a longstanding tradition of the OGU. We hope that these Bibles serve as reminders of God's presence and guidance, as well as the support of the Old Girls' Union. Additionally, we are pleased to announce that the Vocational Prize Scholarship for 2023 was awarded to Year 12 student, Ella McDonald-Gould. During her time at Meriden, Ella was actively involved in the school community, serving her peers and younger year groups, particularly through her leadership role in the Student Christian Group. Ella plans to pursue tertiary studies, and the scholarship funds will support her in this new season of learning. We look forward to following her journey.

One of our ongoing initiatives is to create stronger connections with the senior students at Meriden and introduce them to the talented and supportive community of Meriden Old Girls awaiting them beyond their school journey. This year, an Alumnae versus current students water polo game was held. Despite the Old Girls being out of training for several years, it was an enjoyable and successful morning. We hope to continue to host similar events each year to connect with students and give the Old Girls a chance to showcase their Meriden extracurricular skills.

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to Mrs Brown, Mrs Chilton and Mrs Kirolos for their support of the OGU throughout the year. We look forward to continuing to build relationships with the staff at Meriden and be involved in ways that support the students and the School.

We send our best wishes to the graduating Class of 2023 which has already made a significant impact. Their tenacity and resilience exemplify the Meriden values of faithfulness, resilience and perseverance. We wish all the students at Meriden the very best in their studies.

On behalf of the OGU, I look forward to connecting with you in 2024.

Semper Fidelis



1 Class of 1953 celebrating their 70th anniversary:
(From left) Jill Wilkinson, Monica Spartalis, Jenny Blackman, Jeanette Sims, Lois Johnson and Gwen Bennett

2 Class of 2000: Carla Gagliano, Karen Hall (Payten), Melissa Mangraviti, Danielle Le Ray, Natalya Rodrigo and Jane Killingsworth



Lesley Willcoxson (1972) was in Sydney for her fifty-year reunion. With her sister Penelope (1975) they attended a Service at HMAS Kuttabul, Garden Island, to dedicate a Memorial Plaque to their father, Morris Willcoxson. And who was the Chaplain? Catherine Wynn-Jones (1980)!

4 Melissa Sheppard (1983) and members of the Class of 2003

Back row: Kara Phillips, Annette Sheldrick, Jessica Montgomery, Louise Colley, Tegan Tyrrell, Sarah Woods, Sarah Toomey-Westcott, Anna Hoyles and Mrs Sandra Elms, Year 12 Coordinator 2003
Front row: Serena Ridani, Manuela Milton, Michelle Nguyen and Ashmita Khodeir

5 Tours of the School

6 Morning tea

7 Class of 2012

Back Row: Katherine Chardon, Aneesha Satyendra and Tiana Souvaliotis
Middle Row: Ana Miljak and Ting Ting Chen
Front Row: Celina Estacio and Jessica Estacio

Old Girls' News

Past Meriden students are invited to stay connected with the Meriden community by sending news and updates. Please email 200 words and a photograph to

communityrelations@meriden.nsw.edu.au

FOLLOW THE OGU ON FACEBOOK, INSTAGRAM AND LINKEDIN.

Old Girls come together to inspire and mentor the next generation



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- 1 Guest speaker, Major Sarah Winter (1986)
- 2 Anna Linfield-Kent (2014) and Cassandra Penrose (2014)
- 3 Chi Chi Ireanus (2020)
- 4 Group interview session
- 5 Guest speaker Amelia Lawrence from Dress for Success, a not-for-profit organisation supported by the students
- 6 Year 10 students listening to the guest speakers
- 7 Mary Connolly and Amy Taylor (2015) with Douglas Broadbent, Meriden's Head of Teaching and Learning
- 8 Year 10 MCs Isabella Wong and Sophie Tan

Over sixty Old Girls took part in Meriden's annual Student Futures Day in November. The event provides an invaluable opportunity for Year 10 students to benefit from the experience and wisdom of Old Girls across a broad range of professional fields. The students heard from keynote speaker Major Sarah Winter (1986), and participated in Meet a Mentor sessions and mock job interviews with Old Girls. A series of workshops covered topics such as refining your online presence and mastering the art of good presentation in job interviews.

The School is appreciative of the support and generous gift of time given by our Old Girls in making this event a resounding success.



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- 1 Meet a Mentor session with Dijanna Mulhearn (Buljan, 1984)
- 2 Mrs Vanessa Kirolos, Meriden's Dean of Community Learning
- 3 Meet a Mentor session with Rose Freeburn (2010)
- 4 Meet a Mentor session with Joanne Ling (1984)
- 5 Mrs Lisa Brown interviews film director Claire McCarthy (1993)
- 6 Meet a Mentor session with Sue-Hayley Saboune (2016)
- 7 OGU President Kylie Kapeleris (2004)
- 8 Ruth Stonier (Winter, 1982) and Heather Tralaggan (2009)



CAREER MENTORING PROGRAM AT MERIDEN

Meriden would love to hear from Old Girls who are interested in being a career mentor to current Meriden students.

Meriden Old Girls are a valuable resource for advice and guidance on career opportunities and tertiary pathways for our senior students. The settings may include year group presentations, small group discussions and industry events for students and parents.

If you would like to lend your support to this program, please contact us in one of the following ways:

- Complete the online Expression of Interest form on the Old Girls' page of the Meriden website: <https://www.meriden.nsw.edu.au/community/meriden-old-girls/>
- Drop us a line via email at communityrelations@meriden.nsw.edu.au and let us know about your career, industry sector and why you would like to be involved in mentoring Meriden students
- Allow the School to communicate with you via LinkedIn by adjusting your LinkedIn profile to include Meriden School in the Education section and enable notifications from Meriden.

We look forward to hearing from you!



www.linkedin.com/school/meriden-school-strathfield/



- 1** Tanya Koo (2016), Sue-Hayley Saboune (2016), Krish Waje (2016), Maddison King (2016), Emma Copeman (2016), Sophie Laundry (2017), Natasha Yong (2015), Josephine Ly (2016) and Taylor Lam (2016)
- 2** Year 10 student, Sophie Loane, participates in a Make-up Tutorial
- 3** Year 10 students meet with the alumnae mentors
- 4** Year 10 MC Keira Nguyen

Meriden's Inaugural Water Polo Alumnae Afternoon

A DAY OF CAMARADERIE AND CELEBRATION

On Saturday 16 September, around seventy Years 7 to 12 students, alumnae and their families attended Meriden's inaugural Water Polo Alumnae Afternoon at Auburn Ruth Everuss Aquatic Centre in Lidcombe.

Head Coach – Water Polo, Ms Chloe Wilcox, organised the event so current and past students could connect and bond over their shared love of water polo, with a fierce yet friendly contest between Meriden Old Girls and the current Senior Firsts Team.

Year 10 student Emily Leong was the enthusiastic match commentator, and all students were invited to join the Senior Firsts Team in the pool in the final quarter.

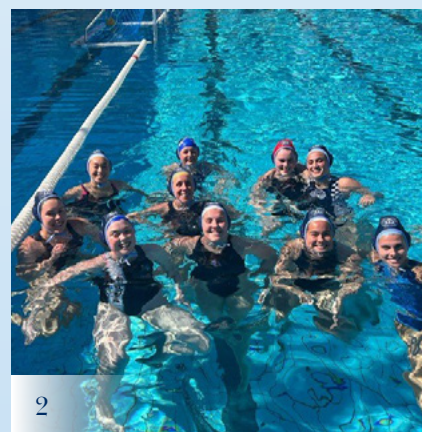
"It was a lovely opportunity for the girls to come together to enjoy the sport as a community," said Ms Wilcox.

"It was also nice for the current students to see how many Meriden Old Girls are now well-established water polo players and are still loving playing the sport. The friendships they make at school are long-lasting," she said, adding that many of the Old Girls had really missed playing the sport.

In a touching finale, current Senior First girls bid farewell to their graduating Year 12 teammates, Emme Doube-MacLeod and Zoe Thomas.



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1 Match commentator Emily Leong, Year 10

2 Old Girls and current students after the game



Meriden graduates pursue STEM at leading international universities

STEPHANIE CUI and SARAH FENG (2022) have accepted offers to study at leading international universities.

Stephanie plans to immerse herself in all that London has to offer after being accepted to Imperial College, a world-class university known for specialising in STEM.

"I am excited to study at a university that provides opportunities to potentially engage in research even in the undergraduate years of my degree," says Stephanie. "I am also looking forward to meeting students from the diverse student body, as the college boasts students from more than 125 countries. First on my London to-do list is a walk through Hyde Park and a visit to the British Museum!"

Sarah is relocating to the USA to attend Illinois' Purdue University, one of the USA's top ten public universities, where she will major in Data Science.

"What I find most attractive about attending university in America is that I will be able to live on campus and experience this unique atmosphere. I know the experience will bring challenges, both academically and in daily life, but I am excited about the growth I will receive in overcoming these challenges," said Sarah.

Stephanie and Sarah participated in the School's Student Futures program which aligns student goals and interests with potential positions at leading world universities. The program is coordinated by Ryan Richards, Meriden's Head of Tertiary Pathways.

Meriden Old Girl tutored by world-famous pianist

Meriden Old Girl, MARYANN GOU (2017), who is currently in her second year of her Master of Music (MMus) in Piano Performance at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music (SFCM), recently joined a master class conducted by world-renowned pianist, Yuja Wang, known for her collaborations with leading orchestras.

Maryann said the class was both an honour and a dream come true. "Sometimes our careers seem too idealistic, almost unattainable, but meeting Ms Wang has reignited my hope that I can do this," Maryann said.

An acclaimed pianist in her own right, Maryann was given two scholarships to the San Francisco Conservatory of Music after completing her Bachelor of Law degree at the University of Technology Sydney.

"The staff really care about their students as individuals and performers and strive for their success. They inspire us and engage in discussions about music, rather than imposing their ideas," said Maryann.

"I would love to keep playing the piano and learning new repertoire, as well as performing as much as I can, despite how nerve-wracking it can be sometimes. I am beyond thankful and beyond grateful, I cannot believe this is my life right now," said Maryann.



JENNIFER MARY TINSLEY (MUIR, 1959)

3.1.1943 — 17.12.2022

Jennifer Muir arrived at Meriden in 1955 for secondary school (then called IVA1). Raised in Gladesville, and a Hunters Hill Tennis Club member, she relished South Coast beach holidays. We all remember Jenny as a skilled, athletic and suntanned student, often seen with her tennis racquet. She had two older brothers, Christopher and Peter, and their home parties were a hit, with the brothers dancing with every girl.

Despite a mishap in her youth, nearly colliding with the strict deputy head, Miss Colborne, for running – a serious rule breach – and a decidedly naughty interlude in Year 9, Jenny thrived; she excelled at hockey, became Senior Tennis Champion in 1958 and Head Prefect in her senior year. Her deeply spiritual Christian faith, integrity and unselfishness were evident early on. An academically gifted hockey and tennis star, excessive responsibilities given to her from a new principal hindered Jenny's chance to achieve her potential in the Leaving Certificate.

After graduating from the Sydney Kindergarten Union Training College in Waverley, Jenny taught in several KU centres before marrying Jim

Harris in 1965, later moving to the Northern Territory, where she gained a deep empathy with and respect for Indigenous people. A devoted mother to Jane (who attended Meriden from 1980 to 1985) and Jeremy, Jenny also cherished her role as grandmother to her four grandsons.

Jenny's first marriage was challenging, and she later developed chronic back pain, unrelieved by surgeries during the 1980s. As a mature student, Jenny graduated from Macquarie University with a BA and postgrad qualifications in Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution, despite needing to lie on her mat in the aisles of a lecture theatre to manage the chronic pain that was her constant companion.

Jenny married Jeff Tinsley in 1994 and settled in Camden Haven, NSW, contributing to her Uniting Church congregation and community and championing social justice. She passed away in Wauchope Hospice surrounded by her family, leaving the Meriden Class of 1959 to mourn her passing, and remain always grateful for her friendship and inspiring leadership.

Robin Morrow (Matthews, 1959)





FRANCES GORDON REYNOLDS (DENT, 1940)

Born on 21 January 1923, Frances followed her sisters Rhoda and Lilian to Meriden at the age of eight, and in her final school year in 1940, she was both Head Prefect and Dux. After graduating from the University of Sydney in 1944 with a Bachelor of Science in Dietetics, she worked at Newcastle Hospital where she met John Reynolds. They were married in 1950, settling in Toronto and raising two children, Bill and Pam. The family moved to Melbourne in 1970, where Frances died on 20th May 2022, a few months short of her 100th birthday, the last surviving child of Oswald and Alice Dent.

Frances started the OGU lunches in Melbourne, hosting some at her property in Sorrento. A two-time breast cancer survivor, she was recognised by the Breast Cancer Network as their longest-known survivor and was a special guest at the first Pink Lady day at the MCG, where she had the honour of tossing the coin at the start of play. She was physically active most of her life, playing tennis, swimming and, in later years, enjoying Pilates. Frances is sadly missed by her children, grandchildren and extended family of nieces and nephews.

Cecily Odgers (Dent, 1961)



PROFESSOR ALLISON HOWELL (1969)

The School community was most saddened to hear of the passing of Allison Howell in November this year.

Attending Meriden from 1962 to 1969, Allison threw herself into the full life of the School and was appointed Head Prefect in 1969. She went on to study at the University of Sydney where she attained a BA (Hons) in Geography and began her working life as a tutor. Over the years, further study saw her receive an MA in Environmental Geography from the University of Toronto and a PhD in Divinity from the University of Edinburgh.

Allison had a varied career and worked with UNICEF and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs before her deep faith led her to begin missionary work in Ghana through Serving in Mission Australia in 1981. Here she found her calling, working for close to forty years in church planting and the training of Ghanaian theology students where

she made a profound contribution to developing several generations of Africa's keenest theological minds. In this role, she was for many years the Dean of Accredited Studies at Akrofi Christaller Institute of Theology.

A dear friend of Meriden, Allison kept in close contact with her old school sending newsletters from Ghana and visiting the School on trips back to Australia. In 2002, she led students and staff in their Easter observations over three days, visiting classes and speaking in Chapel. Her messages were powerful, drawing out the significance of Easter with references to her experiences in Ghana. Meriden students of the early 2000s may well remember helping to raise money to support Allison's missionary work.

A faithful follower of Jesus, the School community is honoured that her name is permanently etched in the fabric of the School through the Allison Howell Drama Theatre in the Greenhalgh Centre for Music and Drama. We give thanks for her life and service.





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