



# PERTH MODERNIAN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Issue 49, August 2021 (Vol 2 No 24)

## WELCOME

## eVent Notice

Hi

WELCOME to your Perth Modernian e-Newsletter offering two-way communication with all members and potential members. We bring to you news, event details and articles from the Perth Modernian Society, its members and Perth Modern School. We hope you find the newsletter both interesting and informative.



PERTH MODERNIAN SOCIETY

For further information

**Telephone: (08) 6189 3690**

[www.perthmoderniansociety.org.au](http://www.perthmoderniansociety.org.au)

[info@perthmoderniansociety.org.au](mailto:info@perthmoderniansociety.org.au)

All messages received either by phone or email are promptly forwarded electronically for further action.

## DIARY DATES

### REUNIONS

See news item for details

### ANNUAL REUNION

**Saturday**

11th September 2021

### CLASS (Year) REUNIONS

Organisers please contact Barbara Mallett through [reunions@perthmoderniansociety.org.au](mailto:reunions@perthmoderniansociety.org.au)  
For further information visit [www.perthmoderniansociety.org.au](http://www.perthmoderniansociety.org.au)

### Class of 1958

'80th Birthdays Reunion'  
Saturday 11th Sept. 2021 (see P9)

### Class of 1971

50th Anniversary Reunion

### Class of 1961

60th Anniversary Reunion

for further information visit

[www.perthmoderniansociety.org.au](http://www.perthmoderniansociety.org.au)

### e-NEWSLETTER

Do you have something to say?  
Memories to share?

Where are YOU now?

Send your news item, letters  
and/or photographs to ...

[newsletter@perthmoderniansociety.org.au](mailto:newsletter@perthmoderniansociety.org.au)

### Next Issues

**Copy deadlines for 2021**

20 November

for circulation by 1 December

### HAVE YOU BOOKED?

## THE 2021 PERTH MODERNIAN SOCIETY ANNUAL REUNION

[www.perthmoderniansociety.org.au](http://www.perthmoderniansociety.org.au)

and

### OPENING CEREMONY

for the

## CYRIL TYLER AUDITORIUM

2pm-5.15pm



PERTH MODERNIAN SOCIETY  
MUSEUM ASSOCIATION  
INCORPORATED

invites you also to visit the Perth Modernian Society History Centre displays on

## SATURDAY 11 SEPTEMBER

Our volunteers will be on hand to answer your questions

**From 12.30pm to 3.45pm**

and again from

**5.15pm to 6pm**



## CONGRATULATIONS!

### GINA WILLIAMS AM

### PMS student 1984-86

In June 2021, in the Queen's Birthday Honours, Gina became a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for services to, the performing arts, indigenous music and to the media.

Just 4 years earlier in June 2017, Gina Williams won the Cit WA, Award (Aboriginal category). She is a singer-songwriter whose work is about ensuring the survival of the Noongar language through music "This beautiful language is such a rare jewel," she said. "I think it's important to know the language of the land you're walking on... (language) is how we reconcile and how we respectfully learn each other's stories." Sunday Times, June 4, 2017. p. 16

Gina came to Mod from Scarborough High School to in her 3rd year of secondary education. From her website we learn that she is a Balladong (Noongar) daughter with links, through her grandmother, to the Kitja people

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VALE

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Jillian Christine Thompson (nee Farr)  
Gwynneth Doris ('Gwynne' or 'Judy') Roberts (nee Parks)  
Sr Judith Anne Berkeley Fitzhardinge  
Edward (Ted) Aaron Zeffert (aged 99)  
Brian John Croker  
Dr Howard Watts  
Alfred John Leslie

INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP  
MODERNIANS WHO DIED IN THE SERVICE  
OF THEIR COUNTRY- No 12  
Robert Alexander Walton Blair  
DIGITAL HONOUR BOARD  
COVID LAMENT

*Thank you to all letter writers,  
and contributors including:*

Ruth Barrett  
Jennifer Bardsley  
Deb Beresford  
Peter Farr  
Robert Johnson  
Barbara Mallett  
Graeme Nyberg  
Philip Roberts  
Robyn White  
**Coordinator/Editor**  
Sallie Davies

## Subscription received CONTRIBUTING MEMBERSHIP Welcome to New Contributors

Sharon Miognacca  
Jaki Richardson

## Thank you for Renewals received

Richard Ammon  
Rod Armitage  
Mary Basley  
Maureen Burgess  
Robert Hinton  
Dale Metcalf  
Norma Metcalf  
Lee Ranford  
Eleanor Roberts

Have you completed or  
updated your

**MEMBERSHIP REGISTRATION  
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION  
and/or CHANGE OF DETAILS**

**Forms** are available on the website  
[www.perthmoderniansociety.org.au](http://www.perthmoderniansociety.org.au)  
further information  
[info@perthmoderniansociety.org.au](mailto:info@perthmoderniansociety.org.au)

of the East Kimberley. Her music is informed by an ancient Indigenous culture and she has drawn from a deep well of recent West Australian and an even deeper personal history.

## REUNIONS

### • 2021 - Class of 1956, 65th Anniversary Reunion

Laurie Best would like to make contact with class-mates at the Annual Reunion and Grand Opening of the Cyril Tyler Auditorium on September 11, 2021. Please email Laurie E: [laurieandphilb@yahoo.com](mailto:laurieandphilb@yahoo.com)

### • 2021 - Class of 1958, '80th Birthdays Reunion'

Reunion Date: 12 noon, Saturday 11th Sept. 2021 (catered lunch in the PMS Refectory)

Contact: Peter Farr, E: [farr.peter@farr.com.au](mailto:farr.peter@farr.com.au), M: 041 990 5864, or Wendy McCallum, E: [wmccallum@inet.net.au](mailto:wmccallum@inet.net.au)

### • 2021 - Class of 1961, 60th Anniversary Reunion

Will be held to coincide with the grand opening of the wonderful, new Tyler Performing Arts Auditorium on Saturday, 11 September 2021. Please contact Jeanette McQueen for further details: E: [jmcqueen@pecs.net.au](mailto:jmcqueen@pecs.net.au) or mobile: 0416 177 975



CLASS V3 (Yr 12) 1961

## YOUR SAY

**From: Dawn Hudson-Taylor (nee Zeitlin), PMS student 1957-61**

**Re: Memorabilia.**

I was a student from 1957-1961. In 1960 we had a massive change to the School, losing many traditions, etc. The reports are very unimpressive but give an idea of what was produced at the time, each signed in ink by the principal, Noel E Sampson.

I hope to see some of the familiar faces (see photograph above) at the reunion on September 11th. Regards, Dawn

**Ed:** *Thank you Dawn for the photographs and reports. The photograph of the V3 students has been included here in celebration of the 60 years gone by since it was taken and you hope to meet up at the Annual Reunion. You may find other items on display in the History Centre.*





PERTH MODERNIAN SOCIETY



#### 2020 - 21 COUNCIL

[info@perthmoderniansociety.org.au](mailto:info@perthmoderniansociety.org.au)

The Hon Julian Grill, *President*  
Dr Robyn White, *Museum and Vice President*  
Kate Lewis, *Webmaster and Vice President*  
Ruth Barrett, *Honour Awards*  
Barrie Baker, *Sphinx Foundation and Membership*  
Deborah Beresford, *Honorary Secretary*  
Eve Broadley, *Honorary Treasurer*  
Peter Farr, *Past President and Sphinx Foundation*  
Ed Lazarus, *Communications*  
Barbara Mallett, *Reunions Coordinator*  
Lois Joll, *ex-officio. PMS Principal*



SPHINX FOUNDATION INC.

#### 2020-21 BOARD

[sphinxfoundation@perthmoderniansociety.org.au](mailto:sphinxfoundation@perthmoderniansociety.org.au)

Nigel Hunt, *Chairman*  
Barrie Baker, *Member*  
Peter Farr, *Hon Treasurer*  
Vivian Wang, *Member*  
Val Furphy, *Associate Principal*

#### DONORS

##### Sphinx Scholarship Fund

22 May -12 August 2021  
Frank Hedges  
Robert (Bob) Johnson  
Bill MacPherson  
Jill Lucas  
Wendy McCallum  
Deirdre Owen  
Roger Stubbs  
Loren White  
Robyn White  
Sharon Williams  
Emma Withers  
Alison Woodman

#### DONORS

##### PMS Museum Fund

From 21 May 2021  
Eric & Judy Alcock  
Mr Barrie Baker  
Mrs Laurie Best  
Ms Marjorie Frances Bowen  
Dr Frank & Mrs J Bruining  
Mr & Mrs J Bruining  
Beryl R Dancer  
Mr James H Davies  
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Dr Irene Froyland  
Mr John L Fry OAM  
Mr Geoff Grewar (2)  
Mr Julian Grill  
Mrs Claire Grose  
Mr Richard Jahn (2)  
Mrs Josette Jones  
Dr Christine Lawson-Smith  
Mrs Wendy McCallum  
Mr Peter Merralls  
Dr Lindsay R Mullings  
Brenda Newbey  
Mrs Margaret Puzey  
Mrs E M Roberts  
Mr Robin Silsbury  
Dr June Stephenson  
Mr John Stone (2)  
Dr Robyn White

**From: Ruth Barrett (nee McWhinney), student 1952-56**  
**re: Beryl Hume**

The Modernian Society's last two newsletters have featured articles about Beryl Hume, distinguished alumna of Perth Modern School. Beryl's brilliant results in the Leaving Examination, and her high achievements in and huge contribution to mathematics education in WA, have been rightly praised. But surprisingly, no mention has been made of a very significant aspect of Beryl's life -- her Christian faith.

Beryl was known to my family for many years. In 1949, when she was Head Girl, she travelled home from school by train, and part of her path from the station was shared with my older sister Nora, then in her first year at Mod. At St Luke's Anglican Church, Mosman Park, Beryl was my Sunday School teacher and mentor, valued especially during my adolescence. In her wider sphere, Beryl was very involved in the Australian Student Christian Movement. In more recent times we were fellow parishioners at Christ Church, Claremont, where Beryl, in spite of sometimes indifferent health, was a great contributor in all sorts of ways. Beryl had a wonderful singing voice, and was for years a member of the choir at St Luke's. Whenever I hear the hymn, "The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want . . ." (Crimond), I also hear, in my mind's ear, Beryl's beautiful descant soaring over particular verses.

Beryl was also a long-time friend of my dear friend Trisha Kotai-Ewers. They were both very special people, and passed away within a few hours of one another in January this year. Warm regards, - Ruth

**Ed:** *I believe you will find reference to Beryl's faith in the book about her life which is referred to in the previous newsletter. It was donated to the History Centre by the family and tells the story of a very remarkable lady. This is available in the History Centre when you visit next. Some of the photograph's Beryl took when teaching at Mod were published recently in the Museum Association's 2020-2021 Annual Report and all will be on display in the Museum for the rest of the year.*

**From: John Leonard Fry, FCPA, FAIB, ACIS, JP, student 1946-48**  
**Re: Your letter to Dear Alumni and Friends**

As an ex-student, going back to the 1940s, I'm most interested, indeed excited, by your project for "Mod" (as we used to refer to it - maybe you still do!) and so I'm very pleased to enclose my cheque by way of a small donation. John F OAM

**Ed:** *Thank you John for your kind words and generous donation to the Perth Modernian Society Museum Fund*

**From: Barbara Mallett (née Culpeper), student 1969-70**  
**Re: Memorabilia**

Attached are some photos you may find of interest. Alan Cressie is riding from Indian Ocean to Pacific Ocean for fundraising. He is class of 1970. I also have the article. BM

**Ed:** *Thank you Barbara for your contributions to our Museum Collection. Well done Alan.*





Mr Andre Winarto  
Hon Daryl Williams AM QC  
Sharon Williams  
Mrs S J Wyburn

#### MODERNIAN HONOURS

[Awards@perthmoderniansociety.org.au](mailto:Awards@perthmoderniansociety.org.au)

#### Modernian Fellow

##### 2014

Sallie Davies  
Malcolm McCusker AC CVO QC  
Donald Tyler

##### 2016

Barrie Baker  
Ian Jarvis

##### 2017

Peter Farr

##### 2020

Dr Kenneth Michael AC Cit WA  
Moderna Scola Award

##### 2016

Deborah Beresford  
Alan Porter

##### 2017

Evelyn Broadley

##### 2018

Rosemary Pratt  
Dr June Stephenson

##### 2019

Robert Johnson

##### 2020

Anne Celia Christmass  
Neil Anthony Coy  
Roger Stubbs AM

#### Honorary Member

##### 2016

Alison Woodman

##### 2017

Tonya McCusker AM

##### 2019

Nigel Hunt  
Brendon Dawson

## VALE

#### NAME:

Emmanuel (Lucky) Valaris

Diane Lee Hunter

Gary Alan Matthews

Ian Campbell McKenzie (Canberra, ACT)

Jillian Christine Thompson (nee Farr)

Gwynneth Doris ('Gwynne' or 'Judy')

Roberts (nee Parks)

Sr Judith Anne Berkeley Fitzhardinge

Dr Howard Watts

Alfred (Alf) John Leslie

Brian John Croker

Barbara Lynne Buchler (nee Halnan)

#### YEAR at PMS

1957-58 (Yrs 4,5)

1957-58

1947-49

1940-42(Yrs 1-3)

1952-56

1938-42

1946, 1970-79

1937-38

1952-56

1953-57

1946-48 (Yrs 1-3)

1954-58

#### Status

Student

Student

Student

Student

Student

School Prefect

Staff

School Prefect

Student

Student

Student

Student

#### Deceased

10/05/2018

11/08/2020

07/02/2021

01/06/2021

15/06/2021

27/06/2021

09/07/2021

29/07/2021

07/08/2021

08/08/2021

21/08/2021

### IAN MCKENZIE, PMS student 1940-42

#### A sister's tribute

Ian's primary school education was at a one teacher school at Mt Marshall until his family lost their farm following drought during his final year. He attended Inglewood Primary School for a few months and was fortunate to win an entrance to Mod. With his father called up as an officer when WW2 broke out, Ian had a burning ambition to join the war effort. He had just finished his naval training when peace was declared, but then saw service in Japan post war.



Following discharge, Ian studied and had an amazing career with the Department of Immigration. His first overseas appointment, lasting five years, was Team Leader at the Australian Embassy Migration Office in Munich. The next overseas posting was as Second Secretary in the newly established Australian High Commission in Suva when Fiji was still a British colony and Australia still had a White Australia Policy.

Following this, Ian, now with a German wife and three children was asked to open the first Australian Migration office in Ankara, Turkey. During a very challenging but enjoyable four years in Turkey, Ian, a keen linguist, mastered yet another language. In extreme contrast, Ian was sent to Hobart, Tasmania on his next posting where he was Commonwealth Director of Migration. The final overseas post was as Senior Migration Officer in Hong Kong in the late

70's, a time in history when Hong Kong was slowly opening up to the outside world. As this was leading up to the return of the British colony to the governance of China, business people were seeking to migrate to set themselves up in capitalist countries.

Ian's career continued in Canberra in the Refugee Programme at a time when a large number of Indochinese asylum seekers and refugees were settled in Australia, requiring him to visit refugee camps in SE Asia.

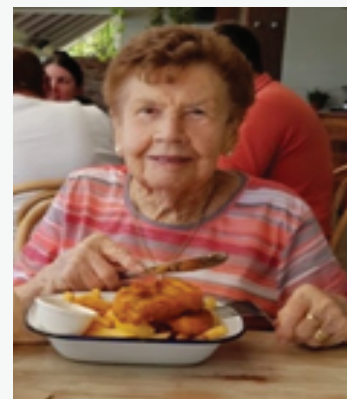
Throughout his career Ian contributed to Australian multiculturalism in a very real way and was proud of this achievement. Jennifer

### GWYNNETH ROBERTS (née PARKS), PMS student 1938-42

#### Tribute for my mother

Gwynneth 'Judy' Roberts, known as Gwynne Parks at school passed away aged 96 on 27 June this year. She attended Perth Modern School from 1938 to 1942 and was a prefect in her final year. She was devoted to PMS and attended as many reunions as possible, often in her later years accompanied by her life-long friend Joy 'Mouse' Hardy (nee Mounsey) right up until last year. Along with her lifelong bond with Mouse they also formed a larger group of friends that lasted through the years – Ailsa Morris (nee Boyce), Julie Lewis (nee Heath) and Barbara Wood (nee Jones).

Gwynne trained in 'Home Science' at Perth Technical College and worked as a Teacher and Teacher Librarian throughout her career which involved 3 stints at PMS, including early on in her career, teaching the famous class of 1946. Gwynne married John Roberts and they produced 3 sons (Geoff, Tim and Philip) and an enduring marriage of 58 years.



 **PERTH MODERN SCHOOL**  
Exceptional schooling. Exceptional students.  
INDEPENDENT PUBLIC SCHOOL  
[www.perthmodern.wa.edu.au](http://www.perthmodern.wa.edu.au)  
for School Board information.



She held strong views on equity and this tied into her devotion to the merit-based approach of PMS and she was always proud of the achievements of the school and its students. - Philpended Perth Modern School from 1938 to 1942 and was a prefect in her final year. She was devoted to PMS and attended as many reunions as possible, often in her later years accompanied by her life-long friend Joy 'Mouse' Hardy (nee Mounsey) right up until last year. Along with her lifelong bond with Mouse they also formed a larger group of friends that lasted through the years – Ailsa Morris (nee Boyce), Julie Lewis (nee Heath) and Barbara Wood (nee Jones).

Gwynne trained in 'Home Science' at Perth Technical College and worked as a Teacher and Teacher Librarian throughout her career which involved 3 stints at PMS, including early on in her career, teaching the famous class of 1946. Gwynne married John

#### **DR HOWARD WATTS, PMS student 1952-56**

Howard was at Mod from 1952-56. He was in the inaugural intake of med students in WA, and after undertaking further training in the UK, he practised in Kalamunda.

#### **BRIAN CROKER, PMS student 1946-48 (yrs 1-3)**

1949-58, Engineering Draftsman, air conditioning and mechanical services;  
1958-77, contracts engineer/manager, air conditioning and mechanical services;  
1977- present, owner company manufacturing flexible ducting for air conditioning.

##### **Leadership Roles**

1971, National President Australian Institute of Refrigeration, Heating and Air Conditioning;  
1974-75, State President, WA Division Australian Institute of Refrigeration, Heating and Air Conditioning;  
1976, President, Air Conditioning and Mechanical Contractors Association of WA;  
1979-90, Founder president, Western Australian Genealogical Society Inc;  
1996-2000, President, Australasian Federation of Family History Organisations;  
19??-77, Senior Circuit Steward Claremont Methodist Circuit;  
1990-99, Chair, Cottesloe Parish of Uniting Church in Australia

#### **EMMANUEL 'Lucky' VALARIS, PMS student 1954-58**

"I noticed that you are seeking information about Emmanuel Valaris contact details. Emmanuel has passed away. He was run over by a motorist on 10/5/2018. He was known as 'Lucky' Valaris. Regards, Anna, Emmanuel`s wife."

##### **Tribute from a classmate:**

'Lucky' was in my class and was the Ian Thorpe of the Perth Mod swim team. He was a terrific bloke at school and had a superb physique.



#### **From the MUSEUM ARCHIVE**

Photo of Lucky taken at the 1958 Swimming Carnival the original photograph features Ronald George Groves and Emmanuel Valaris, better known as 'Lucky' (well, he was Greek). Both were swimming stars, 'Lucky' the Captain of Blue Faction. Ronald entered Perth Mod in 1st year whereas Lucky was a 'New 4'. Both initially became teachers but not sure what became of them in the long term though I think Lucky went to New South Wales.

#### **JILLIAN THOMPSON (née FARR), PMS student 1952-56**



#### **Tribute from her brother Peter**

"Regretfully, I am writing to pass on the news that my dear sister Jillian Christine Thompson (1952-1956), long-standing Contributing member, passed away in Bethesda Hospital on 15th June 2021 (aged 81, DOB 22/11/1939).

Perth Mod was very special to Jill and she came along to Modern School and Perth Modernian Society events whenever she was able to do so, and appreciated the Society's eNewsletters. She was on the mailing list for the school newsletter and was reading the April '21 edition when she was in SCGH. I was able to let Jill know that the opening of the Cyril Tyler Auditorium and also the Modernians Annual Reunion would be on 11th Sept. and she regretted that she could not be present. - Peter Farr. Past President. Perth Modernian Society Inc."

Jillian achieved gold medals in nursing (RPH, 1960) and midwifery (KEMH), led a wonderful, exemplary Christian life, was wise as well as loving, and she had many close friends from Perth Mod days.



Jill was elected a Fellow of the Australian College of Midwives (ACM) and was also made a Life Member. She was the National Delegate for WA on the ACM for six years and worked tirelessly to promote midwifery continuity of care, together with the rights of women to choose the birth that they wanted in the care of a midwife. Professor of Obstetrics, and Modernian Con Michael AO paid this tribute: "Jill was a wonderful Midwifery educator and a great contributor. I recall our lively debating (sparring) sessions about midwives and obstetricians. I must say I rarely won! It was a pleasure to have had her as a professional colleague who probably taught me more than I taught her."

Jill was adept at diverse things including cooking, gardening, French, Bridge, travel planning, finances, and technology. She enjoyed the Arts, Leeuwin Concerts, WASO, films, reading books, newspapers, Vogue Magazine, and English Country Life Magazine.

Despite the inevitable progression of Acute Myeloid Leukaemia, Jill optimistically renewed her passport this year. Adoring wife of Martyn (dec) for 50 years, Jill was brave till the end and she managed to tick everything on her bucket list. Jill went out in style with silver tea service served by her sons Robert and Andrew two days before she succumbed at Bethesda Hospital, her life's work done.

### **JUDITH ANNE BERKELEY FITZHARDINGE RGS, PMS student 1937-38**

*"FITZHARDINGE JUDITH ANNE BERKELEY RGS (SR JUDITH)*

*The passing of Jude in Sydney on the 9th July, at age 99, marks the end of an era, being the last surviving sibling of the "Famous Fitzhardinges".*

*"Sr Judith who died peacefully on Friday 9 July aged 99 years in Sydney. Judith was a vibrant, loving member of Good Shepherd communities in Australia and New Zealand where she ministered in a variety of areas of social justice. Judith lived her life to the full sharing fun and laughter with everyone. May she rest in peace."* Published in The West Australian

### **ALFRED JOHN LESLIE, PMS student 1953-57**

Born in Cottesloe on 4 April 1940. Alf attended Perth Modern School and UWA before moving to Canberra for a career in both science and the public service, with a focus on health. In later years Alf enjoyed travelling through Europe with his wife Sue and spending time with friends and family. His sharp intellect, wonderful sense of humour, and passion for life, politics, the Sydney Swans, wine and horticulture, remained until the end. He loved Sue, his sons and extended family. He was dearly loved and will be deeply missed by his wife Sue, his sons Stephen, Christopher and Timothy, his stepchildren Tracey and Shaun, and his grandchildren and great grandchildren. – published in the West Australian 21 August 2021



**PERTH MODERNIAN SOCIETY**

## **INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

### **Photo: Helen Lydon - Guest Speaker**



At the Perth Modernian Society's AGM, held on June 21st the invited speaker was Perth Mod teacher Ms Helen Lydon. Among her career appointments, Helen has worked in government and private schools, with engineers at UWA, and with the Tertiary Institutions Service Centre. In 2012 her prize-winning master's thesis at UWA was on student feedback. With 20 years of varied experiences in education behind her, Helen joined the staff of Perth Modern School in 2021 as the inaugural Manager of Innovations and Entrepreneurship. Her address to the AGM was extremely interesting, opening new vistas for those present.

Helen has brought teachers together for a cross-curricular program which encourages students to develop personal and metacognitive skills – in colloquial terms, to work together and think outside the box. Parents, experts, and leaders have been invited to take part, and some have already done so, helping the community and the school to engage with one another. In a survey of employers asking about desirable qualities in employees, 50% rated problem-solving as a sought-after attribute, so Helen's approach is highly relevant to the students' future job prospects. Topics already explored creatively and successfully have included the need for water conservation, and how urgent messages might be conveyed to young people.





The course Helen has launched involves students in Years 7, 8 and 9. Real-life problems are tackled while fulfilling the Australian Curriculum requirements in developing general capabilities, which focus on Critical and Creative Thinking, Ethical Understanding, Intercultural Understanding and Personal and Social Capability. In recent times so-called social media, often spreading 'alternative facts', have become all-pervasive for many adolescents. It is imperative that children are helped to become 'media-savvy'. Also, the exploitation of children and minority groups has in the last few years been brought to public attention as never before. An understanding of inter-cultural issues, personal safety, and ethics is vital for young people just entering adult life.

The Perth Modernian Society is grateful to Ms Lydon for providing an insight into this promising new venture at Modern School.



PERTH MODERNIAN SOCIETY  
MUSEUM ASSOCIATION  
INCORPORATED

Photo: Elected Councillors joined members of the Board of the Perth Modernian Society Museum Association Incorporated on Monday 2 August 2021 to receive the 2020-2021 Annual Report on behalf of all members of the Perth Modernian Society Inc.



## MODERNIANS WHO DIED IN THE SERVICE OF THEIR COUNTRY

*Number 12 in a special series of articles prepared for publication by  
Robert Johnson, PMS student 1961-65 and Museum Volunteer*

### **Robert Alexander Walton Blair PMS student 1935 to 1939**

On the night of 16/17 June, 1944, 77 Squadron RAF was ordered to bomb the synthetic oil plant in Sterkrade, a suburb of Oberhausen in Germany. Seven of the 21 aircraft that bombed the target did not return. Robert Blair was the pilot of one of those aircraft.

Robert Alexander Walton Blair was born on 18 January 1922 to Robert Walton Blair and Vera Marion Blair of 24 Ruislip Street, West Leederville. "Walton" was his grandmother Mary's maiden name. Robert commenced at Perth Modern School on 5 February 1935 and left in December 1939. He engaged in hockey, football, athletics and swimming. He passed his Leaving Exam in English, Maths A, Maths B, Physics and Chemistry. His teachers described him as "A fine type", "Shows up well as a leader" and "A good influence".

After graduating, Robert joined the Bank of New South Wales (now Westpac) and was posted to its Kellerberrin branch. University of Western Australia records show that Robert was enrolled in a Commerce degree in 1940. While still a bank clerk, Robert enlisted in the RAAF in Perth on 21 June 1941 when he was 19½. His service number was 415498. He was still single and his address was the family home in West Leederville.

Robert attended numerous flying training schools in Australia prior to embarking for the UK, arriving at No. 11 (RAAF) Personnel Despatch and Receiving Centre in Bournemouth on 18 April 1943. He was transferred to No. 3 (Pilot) Advanced Flying Unit at South Cerney in Gloucestershire on 8 June 1943 for two-engine training on Airspeed Oxfords, and then to 27 Operational Training Unit at Lichfield, 30kms north of Birmingham, on 17 August 1943 for training on four-engine bombers. On 31 December 1943 Robert was transferred to No. 41 Base, the training base for No. 4 Group, Bomber Command, and then on 22 March 1944 he joined 77 Squadron, RAF, at Elvington in Yorkshire. The squadron, equipped with four-engine Halifax bombers, relocated to Full Sutton in West Yorkshire in May 1944.

Robert was an Airman Pilot during most of this time. He was promoted to Leading Aircraftsman on 28 February 1942, Temporary Sergeant on 3 December 1942 and Temporary Flight Sergeant on 3 June 1943. He was commissioned as a Pilot Officer on 11 May 1944.





Robert Blair at enlistment



Halifax heavy bomber



Robert Blair (front centre) and crew

Robert's last trip was as pilot and captain of Halifax NA508. The seven-man crew consisted of five Australians and two British. The aircraft took off from Full Sutton aerodrome at 11:15pm and was not heard from again.

On 20 June 1944, police captain Handrik Busser of Nieuwer-Amstel, just south of Amsterdam, reported that a burning aircraft had crashed in the "Bovenker-kerpolder" (low-lying land enclosed by embankments) of the town. He immediately went to the place and saw a "completely destroyed and burning aircraft. It was a terrific fire and the munitions in the aircraft caused incessant explosions. The crew was invisible and the aircraft had deeply penetrated the ground." A left hand was later found in the depression.

In 1953, the body of Warrant Officer John O'Meara was found during drainage works. In July, 1990 the wreckage of the aircraft was excavated and other remains recovered. All remains are buried in the Canadian War Cemetery in Bergen op Zoom.

Grave stones of the crew of Halifax NA508 in the cemetery at Bergen op Zoom, Holland



German records show that the Halifax was shot down by Luftwaffe ace Major Martin Drewes of Night Fighter Wing 1 who had taken off from Leeuwarden airfield, 130kms north of Amsterdam, at 1am in a Messerschmitt Bf 110 G-4 radar-equipped heavy fighter.

Martin Drewes and a Messerschmitt Bf 110 G-4 radar-equipped night fighter



Robert Blair was 22 years old when he died. His mother, Vera, died in 1994 aged 98, 50 years after her son.





## References

## Websites

- [https://bdm.justice.wa.gov.au/\\_apps/pioneersindex/default.aspx](https://bdm.justice.wa.gov.au/_apps/pioneersindex/default.aspx)
- <https://www2.mcb.wa.gov.au/NameSearch/details.php?id=KC00043076>
- <https://www2.mcb.wa.gov.au/NameSearch/details.php?id=KC00114247>
- <https://www.web.uwa.edu.au/uwabs/uwa-ww2/nominal-roll>
- <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=9264845>
- <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=4893691>
- <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=5381173>
- [https://birtwistlewiki.com.au/wiki/No.\\_11\\_Personnel\\_Despatch\\_%26\\_Receiving\\_Centre\\_RAAF](https://birtwistlewiki.com.au/wiki/No._11_Personnel_Despatch_%26_Receiving_Centre_RAAF)
- <http://aircrewremembered.com/blair-robert.html>
- <https://rafww2butler.wordpress.com/operational-training/>
- <http://www.rafcommands.com/database/serials/details.php?uniq=na508>
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- <https://77squadron.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/77-RAF-July-2016.pdf>
- <http://www.raf-lichfield.co.uk/OTUindex.htm>
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin\\_Drewes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Drewes)
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RAF\\_Elvington](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RAF_Elvington)

## DIGITAL HONOUR BOARD

<https://honour.perthmodern.wa.edu.au/>

As reported in previous issues Volunteers in the PMS Museum History Centre have been working on a digital honour board to commemorate the 151 former students who died as a result of their service in **World War 1** (29), **World War 2** (118), **Malaya** (1) and **Vietnam** (3). It has been posted on the school's website and is the result of the accumulation of researched information by a considerable number of people since 1915. The project was funded partly by donations to the Perth Modernian Society Museum Association and partly by a grant from the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

The honour board can be sorted by column which provides some poignant information. For example, sorting by **Date of Death** and then **Unit** shows that both **Leslie Little** and **Frank Williamson** commenced at Modern School when it opened in 1911, served in France in the 51st Battalion, and died within three weeks of each other in 1916. Leslie was 19 years and 11 months old and Frank was 17 years and 10 months, the youngest of the school's students to die as a result of their service. Clicking on their names shows that they both died in the fighting at Mouquet Farm in France. Our continuing research will gradually fill the remaining empty cells and there is a feedback form for readers to let us know of any errors.

The next stage of the digital honour board project is to link each name to a short biography similar to the profile below. have been appearing in the newsletters over the last two years. The stage will be to develop a Nominal Roll to commemorate 1,592 students served and survived the experience. The University of Western Australia Historical Society has recently released a similar nominal roll of UWA World War 2 survivors consisting of 1,401 names at <https://www.web.uwa.edu.au/uwabs/uwa-ww2/nominal-roll>

**Digital Honour Board Stage 1** - details of the 152 former students who lost their lives as a result of their service <https://honour.perthmodern.wa.edu.au/> Updating the honour board continues. In a recent exchange of emails with the National Archives of Australia regarding a recommended correction to its record regarding Colin Campbell (PMS 1934-37), the NAA staff member stated, "It's great seeing how you've used the information available from the various sources to create such a useful digital roll." The number of views by 12 August was 2,460."  
- Robert Johnson

*"The Board of the Perth Modernian Society Museum Association Incorporated would like to express our appreciation to the School's web administrators, Noop, for the development of the Digital Honour Board at <https://honour.perthmodern.wa.edu.au/>. We look forward to the completion of Stage 2 of the project which consists of developing the digital architecture to link the names on the Honour Board to short biographies of each of the students."*  
- Dr Robyn White, Chair



Spring has come  
The wattles flower  
Along the river  
In golden shower

Spring has come  
We should be walking  
Out in the bush  
The trails are calling

Spring has come  
Is COVID going?  
Not yet mate  
No Pfizer's flowing

Spring has come  
And non too soon  
A welcome sight  
To ease our gloom

Spring has come  
But here in VIC  
It's lockdown time  
We're in the nick

Has Spring come now  
In West Aust too?  
It's good there mate  
No worse than flu

**Graeme Nyberg, PMS student 1954-58**

