

# Westleigh College



Northcote

1886 - 1961



---

---

# Contents

	<b>Page No.</b>
Foreward	1
1. The Northcote Side of the River	3
2. From Clifton Hill to Rucker's Hill	5
3. The Education of Middle Class Northcote	7
4. The Everards to the Rescue	9
5. Air Raid Shelters and Oslo Lunches	11
6. The Westleigh Community	14
7. The Fall of the Peppercorn Tree	18
References	20

## **Cover Photographs**

- Front    *Photographed outside Westleigh C. 1948*
- Back    *Commander Everard, nephew of the Everard Sisters,  
hosts Westleigh girls on excursion to his ship C.1946*



---

# Foreward

Westleigh College was opened by the Misses Westgarth in 1886 and closed by the Misses Everard in 1961. During its seventy-five year history Westleigh survived two depressions and two world wars, all the while providing a distinctively traditional and caring education for the small numbers of students (mainly girls) who attended the school.

The reunion held in October 1991 marked the thirtieth anniversary of the closure of the school and thus provided an appropriate occasion on which to attempt a brief sketch of the history of Westleigh College.

A number of factors made this task more than usually difficult. Westleigh's status as a privately owned school meant that most of its records were kept in private hands rather than with more accessible State and Church authorities. Nor has there been, at least in recent times, a former students' association to keep alive the memory of the school. The fact that nevertheless, it has been possible to piece together a history of the school is due to the assistance I received from many sources. Two histories of Northcote by William George Smith (1928) and Andrew Lemon (1983) provided the historical context for the development of the school, as well as some few valuable references to Westleigh College. A second source of information were the letters, photographs, school reports and accounts which had been conserved by former Westleigh students (and their parents) and made available to the writer.

I owe a debt of gratitude to those former pupils of the school who so generously gave of their time to share with me their memories of the school they attended in some cases over seventy and even eighty years ago!

My particular thanks go to Josephine Smith (nee Archer) who initiated this reunion of former Westleigh students, who typed the first draft of this work and who provided me with much encouragement and support.

Trevor Batrouney

## 1. *The Northcote Side of the River*

When Misses Jessie and Isobel Westgarth established their "Girls High School, Westleigh" in Michael Street at the corner of Queens Parade and Heidelberg Road in 1886 they did so at a propitious time.

Progress was to be seen everywhere in Northcote. The streets were lit with gas lighting which had been installed in 1875 and by 1887 the cable tram rattled up and down High Street. However, the cable trams were not the only form of transport. By the late 1890s a Mr. B.D. Cameron demonstrated a steam motor fitted to a phaeton. A former student of Westleigh recalls seeing the Westgarth sisters travelling by steam phaeton up High Street from Clifton Hill to Rucker's Hill in the early years of the century.

Grand houses, villas and cottages were already to be seen on the summit of Rucker's Hill, chief of which was the Rucker Mansion in Bayview Street. It was already half a century since the German born William Frederick Augustus Rucker had bought two allotments (including the steep, flat-topped hill) at the first land sales in the district in 1839. The mansion that he built in 1841 was to house Westleigh College during the second decade of the next century. The Rucker Mansion, known later as "Sunnyside" and then "The Alpines", stood until 1925 when it was demolished to build the Anglican Church of the Epiphany.



*Rucker's Mansion in 1925*

Despite the original visions that the northern reaches of Melbourne might become the home to "mansions of our merchant princes", by 1890 Northcote had become, in most respects, "a working man's suburb". As such it formed the natural extension of housing for the working people of Fitzroy and Collingwood.

The decade of the 1880s saw Northcote separate from the parish of Jika Jika and become a borough in 1883. By 1890 Northcote was proudly proclaimed a town and, to complete the picture, the residents of Northcote enjoyed their own newspaper when the first edition of the Northcote Leader and District Record was published in 1888.

In Northcote, as elsewhere, private schools predated state schools. Many of these schools had their origins as "dame schools", where refined ladies, invariably pairs of sisters, would offer a genteel education to the young children of those who could afford to pay their modest fees. Other private schools were, from the beginning, associated with Churches and invariably built alongside them. The very first school in the Northcote district was the Merri Creek School, which was opened near the confluence of the Yarra River and Merri Creek with twenty-six aboriginal pupils on 1 January 1846. This was followed by the establishment in 1854 of the Wesleyan Methodist Church and School in Upper High Street. For the next three decades this was to become Northcote's chief public building, parts of which survive to this day behind a shop front at 148-150 High Street, Northcote. Just a few doors away was the school of John and Hannah Dunkerley which catered for the Primitive Methodists from 1859-1861. The Anglicans, who had founded the All Saints Church in Lower Northcote, established a school there in 1860 which lasted until 1874.

Other private schools, which were established around the same time as



Westleigh, included one run by Miss E. South in Northcote, a Presbyterian School established by Miss Fraser at the Manse in Ross Street, a Catholic School opened by Mrs. Peasley in Mitchell Street and Mr. T. Rodda's Preston Grammar School.

Two later attempts to establish private schools in Northcote were equally short lived: the Northcote and Clifton Hill Grammar School, which opened in 1890 and R.T. Farr's tiny Northcote Grammar in High Street. Thus the establishment of Westleigh in 1886 was but one of the many attempts to provide a private education for the children of Northcote. However, most of these schools led a precarious and brief existence.

The passing of the Education Act of 1872 in which education was to become free and compulsory provided the impetus for the establishment of the first state school in Northcote at Helen Street in 1874. Other schools followed, so that by 1927 Northcote boasted six state schools (Helen St, Wales St, Clarke St, Hutton St, Pender's Grove and Northcote High School) three Roman Catholic Schools (St. Joseph's, St. Mary's, The Good Samaritan Ladies College) and Westleigh College.

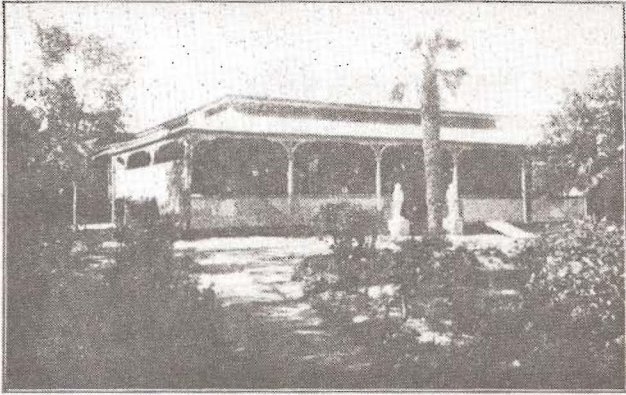
Why did Westleigh College, with affiliation to neither church nor state, survive not only to 1927 but until 1961 when its doors closed forever?

## WESTLEIGH COLLEGE

(Established 1886.)

### Northcote

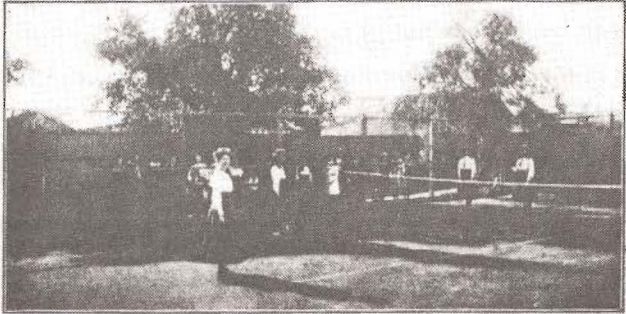
PRINCIPALS: MISSES WESTGARTH  
Assisted by UNIVERSITY STAFF (Visiting and Resident)



Elevated, healthy position; large grounds. Communion class-rooms; dormitory built to the requirements of Board of Health. School library. Sports club.

Limited number of boarders received, who are under the personal supervision of the Principals, and have all home privileges consistent with school discipline.

THOROUGH EDUCATION from KINDERGARTEN to SENIOR PUBLIC.  
Classes for Painting, Drawing, Flawtation, Music, Singing, Dancing, Physical Culture, Domestic Economy





*Class of 1910*



---

---

## 2. *From Clifton Hill to Rucker's Hill*

The Westgarths were a family of substance. As early as 1845 William Westgarth a prosperous merchant, bought 46 acres of land on the Brunswick side of the Merri Creek which he sold nine years later at a handsome profit. We know that William Westgarth returned to England after a short stay in the colony. The next we learn of the family is that two of his daughters, Jessie and Isobel, established their "Girls High School, Westleigh" in a large house in Michael Street, Fitzroy (later Clifton Hill). This substantial property was large enough not only to house the new school but also to take in some boarders. It also served as the home of Jessie and Isobel who ran the school assisted by their sister Edith and brother Willy. Just five years later the first service of the Clifton Hill Presbyterian/Methodist Church was held in their house in 1891.

Westleigh survived the depression of the 1890s which saw the demise of many similar private schools in Melbourne. By the beginning of the century the Westgarth sisters were ready to embark on a program of expansion. No doubt realising the growing dominance of Upper Northcote, Jessie and Isobel bought a large house at 212 Clarke St, Northcote. In 1902 they moved their junior school and shortly afterwards, their kindergarten to this residence, leaving the senior school in Clifton Hill.

The expansion continued apace. In 1906 the Westgarths took over the Northcote College and Kindergarten which had been run by Miss Dixon since 1903 at the Wesleyan School Room in High Street. With most of their students now coming from Upper Northcote, in 1910 the Westgarth sisters purchased a large house on the lower side of Bayview Street. Soon after Westleigh moved into the Rucker Mansion, now named "The Alpines", on the crest of Rucker's Hill. So grand was this house that the senior school was now transferred there and the juniors dispatched to Fitzroy.

By 1912 Westleigh College had 106 enrolments, including a small number of boarders who lived in a

smaller house in Bayview Street, which later became the dwelling of the Rayments and then the Everard sisters. Westleigh's advertisements showed the school and spacious classrooms, a fine dormitory for boarders, in fact everything: "large grounds, poultry, cow, sports, tennis, badminton, school library" (*quoted in Lemon 1983:154*)



C. 1922

The two Westgarth sisters ran the school until 1917 helped by their younger sister Edith and their brother Willy, who did the gardening. The teachers included Miss Giblet who was in charge of the girl's boarding house, Miss Kate Gresham who taught French, Madam Ashley who taught singing and Mrs Sonnenberg who was remembered striding up Rucker's Hill to take the senior history classes. Miss Rayment was head of the junior school.

Physical Culture was taken by Professor Bjelke Petersen and Mr England. Prof. Bjelke Petersen eventually established an academy in the city and was to send physical culture teachers to Westleigh during the 1920s and early 1930s.

Among the more vivid memories of students from this era were the Speech Nights at one of which John Cain Senior gave out the prizes, sports days at the Northcote Cricket Ground and geography and painting held in a tent in James Paddock at the rear of the school.

Other public events which would have marked the life of the school during this period were the Queen's Jubilee in 1897 which was celebrated by a



bonfire and fireworks at Croxton Park and the festivities for the Relief of Mafeking during the Boer War in 1900. Finally, the students would have been involved in the celebrations in 1914, on the eve of World War 1, when Northcote was proclaimed a city.

We know that Westleigh College was to the fore in two concerts held to aid the war effort in 1914. The first was a Grand Patriotic Concert by the pupils of Westleigh College held in the Northcote Town Hall on 7th October, 1914. The second was a concert given by the private schools of Melbourne in the Athenaeum Hall in Collins Street Melbourne on 9th December, 1914.

**NORTHCOTE TOWN HALL.**  
**Wednesday, October 7th, 1914.**  
**Grand Patriotic Concert**  
 By PUPILS OF WESTLEIGH COLLEGE,  
Assisted by Leading Melbourne Artists.  
 IN AID OF THE RED CROSS SOCIETY.

---

Vocal Director - MADAM EVELYN ASHLEY.

CHORUS	"We'll fight for our Australia"	SCHOOL
SONG	"Angus Macdonald"	Miss Florrie Gordon
PIANO SOLO	"Duetto" (Mendelssohn)	MISS ELEANOR PILKINGTON, T.D.L.C.M.
CHORUS	"Scarlet and Blue"	KINDERGARTEN CLASS
SONG	"Australia's Answer"	Mr. Chas. Ledward
RECITATION	"Sons of the Southern Sea"	MISS BELLE WARDEN
CHORUS	"Sons of the Sea"	BOYS' SCHOOL
SONG	"Marcellaise"	Madam Evelyn Ashley

-----  
 INTERVAL  
 -----

PHYSICAL CULTURE DISPLAY		
PIANO SOLO	"Rustle of Spring"	MISS PHYLLIS ASHLEY
SONG	"The Deathless Army"	Mr. Chas. Ledward
SONG AND CHORUS	"Land of Hope and Glory"	MISS MYRTLE OSMELL
SONG	"Dream of Home"	Madam Evelyn Ashley
QUARTETTE	"Rosa"	(MISSSES D. BAIRD, E. JOHNSON, J. WHALLEY, G. SALMON)
SONG	"There's a Land"	Miss Florrie Gordon
VOCAL POLKA	Soloists—MISSSES C. MORGAN, D. BAIRD, M. GEMMELL, O. OLVER	
TRIO	"Ol'pay Laughing Song"	(Madam Evelyn Ashley, Miss Florrie Gordon, and Mr. Chas. Ledward.)
SONG AND CHORUS	"Union Jack"	

England—MISSSES LUGTON and M. APPLEBYARD  
 Scotland—MISSSES D. APPLEBYARD and M. REYNOLDS  
 Ireland—MISSSES O. OLVER and M. GEMMELL  
 NATIONAL ANTHEM.

ADMISSION 1/- Dance 7.15 Commence at 8.

The names of some of the students who attended the school around 1915 are included in the Prize List. Their names read like a list of the more prominent families in Northcote and surrounding areas during the first two decades of this century. Many were the children of shopkeepers, merchants, manufacturers and professionals. Westleigh also included among its boarders some students whose parents were overseas on business and government affairs. In short, Westleigh provided a private school education for middle class Northcote, a tradition that was to continue into the 1920s.

**Westleigh College, Northcote.**

The annual distribution of prizes took place in the school hall on Monday morning, December 14th. J. G. Membrey, Esq., M.L.A., presided, and gave a stirring address to the pupils, after which patriotic items were rendered.

It was mentioned in the report that the girls had been working for the British Red Cross Society, and a parcel had been sent to the Northcote branch.

A patriotic concert, held in the Northcote town hall in October, resulted in a balance of £20, also for the red cross fund; £3 6d was collected for the Lord Mayor's patriotic fund; £1 8s for the Alfred Hospital; and, as usual, £3 16s has been forwarded for support of a native boy at the mission school, Dummagudem, India.

At the annual Church Missionary Society's examination for secondary schools 17 pupils were entered, and 16 were successful, 6 gaining prizes (80 per cent.), 4 honors (75 per cent.), and 6 passes (50 per cent.) Eleanor Pilkington won the first prize in the whole examination of 420 candidates.

The junior pupils were entertained at a party at the college on Saturday evening, and a picnic at Greensborough had been arranged for the senior scholars for Tuesday, but owing to the inclement weather it had to be postponed till the beginning of next year, and instead they were taken to the Northcote picture theatre on Monday night.

The Misses Westgarth were the recipients of a case of table silver from their pupils.

**Prize List**

J.P. class.—Dux, V. Steiner. Class work, G. Salmon, G. Olver, M. Appleyard. Examinations, C. Salmon, G. Olver, E. Lugton.

Class V.—Dux, G. Foreman. Examinations, L. Smith, R. Pinkerton, C. Brennecke. Class work, L. Smith.

Class IV.—Dux, E. McQuie. Examinations, E. Johnson, J. Whalley, D. Baird. Class work, G. Salmon, E. Johnson.

Class III.—Dux, R. Richardson. Class work, L. Creak, D. Cherry, M. Moulden, G. Johnson. Examinations, L. Creak, D. Cherry, M. Moulden.

Class II.—Dux, B. Appleyard. Class work, F. Johnson, L. Strover, M. Wood, P. Magno, D. Webber, E. Wood, T. F. Johnson, F. Lawrence, E. Gibaud.

Class I.—Dux, E. Mahngren. Class work, A. Dunn, U. Salmon, M. Harris, M. Appleton, A. Hooper, H. Foreman, M. Pilkington, I. Dutton.

Kindergarten.—Dux, L. Creak. Class work, L. Brennecke, W. Lacey, J. Harwood, K. Pilkington, B. Gleeson, A. Slater.

Boys' school.—Dux, R. Lawrence. Examinations, M. Britten.

III.—Dux, R. Harrington. Class work, R. Slater, L. Walker, J. McQuie. Examinations, R. Slater, L. Walker. Scripture, R. Harrington. General knowledge, R. Lawrence, R. Harrington. Conduct, J. McQuie.

Literature.—J.P., C. Morgan; V., G. Foreman; III., R. Richardson.

Scripture.—J.P., G. Olver; V., B. Andrew; I.V., E. McQuie; III., R. Richardson; II., B. Appleyard; conduct, B. Andrew and P. Kearnes.

Singing (Madame Evelyn Ashley's gift).—G. Olver, C. Morgan, B. Appleyard, F. Johnson.

Music.—B. Warden, E. Moorman.

Drawing (Miss Finley).—M. Appleyard.

Elocution.—B. Warden.

Physiological diagrams.—M. Appleyard, E. Usher, R. Nunn.

Needlework.—A. Johansen, E. Moorman, L. Creak.

Physical culture (Prof. Rjelke Petersen).—M. Appleyard, J. Whalley, M. Britten.

Tennis (R. Tobin, Esq.)—M. Apple-



---

---

### 3. *The Education of Middle Class Northcote*

The Westgarth sisters had controlled the destiny of Westleigh College for the first thirty years of its existence. During that time they had established the school on firm foundations, had overseen its expansion during the early years of the century and ensured its survival during the First World War.

In 1917 Westleigh passed into the hands of the sisters Kate and Ada Gresham, of whom Kate at least had taught at the school. Thus was established a tradition, which was to be followed in later years, whereby one or two teachers at the school would purchase it from the retiring principals. In 1919 Ada Gresham had left the school which was then run jointly by Miss Kate Gresham and Miss Elsie Rayment.

Soon after the World War I the buildings facing James St were built and the school was housed there with the kindergarten room still used as a dormitory and the residence as the home of the Rayment sisters. Former students recall Miss Mae Rayment selling raspberry vinegar and orange juice from a counter dividing the dormitory from the house.

The impact of the war upon the school may be seen in the report of the Inspector of the Council of Public Instruction which noted that students seldom went beyond Form III and that standards may not be high enough for continued registration as a secondary school. He did however commend the school for its "good atmosphere and tone" (*Lemon, 1983:197*)



1928

During the twenties the teachers included Miss Mae Rayment (Needlework), Mrs Flynn (Arithmetic) and Miss Cuff, who was in charge of the kindergarten. Miss Gresham taught English and was regarded by more than one former pupil as a somewhat severe person, but a good teacher "who made you understand things", whereas Miss Rayment was remembered as "gentle, strict but gentle". Physical Culture continued to be provided by the Bjelke Petersen Academy. Miss Ruby Bond taught singing and Miss Moss took ballroom dancing. The young ladies of Northcote were even taught how to present themselves if they went to court!

During the 1920s few students went beyond Form III, leaving to attend one of the larger private schools such as Merton Hall, Ivanhoe Grammar or Methodist Ladies College. One student recalled being well prepared at Westleigh and that the school's standards were acceptably high.

During the 1920s the school continued to take around 100 students, the great majority of whom were girls. However during most of Westleigh's history, there have always been some boys at the school, often brothers of the girls attending. The number of boys increased somewhat in the 1920s when an arrangement was made to take around 20 choir boys, presumably from the Anglican Church of All Saints and the newly established Epiphany Church.

Although Westleigh was never affiliated with a Church it did provide a Christian education marked by the reciting of the Lord's Prayer and possibly a psalm at morning assembly, held either in the double room or the school yard. Religious instruction classes were usually taken by Anglican clergy or lay persons.

The emphasis on genteel education, established by the Westgarth sisters, was continued in the twenties. The strict injunctions about appropriately modest behaviour for young ladies have been remembered down the years: "always sit with your feet together".



"never cross your legs", "always wear your hat and gloves in the street", "do not eat ice cream in the street", "always wear navy, not white petticoats". And yet the teachers were remembered as kindly and caring.

Few schools in Northcote could have been more loyal than Westleigh, a loyalty which included King, Country and Empire. This not only permeated the curriculum but was also strongly expressed on special occasions such as patriotic concerts, contributions to the building of the Shrine of Remembrance and Anzac Day marches along High Street to the Cenotaph or Broken Column. A feature of the 1920s was the publication by the senior girls of their magazine "Leisure Hours". Something of the achievement ethos of the school is to be found in this note by a Form VI student in 1922 -

*"Once more we are havtng exams! As this is the Third Term and therefore the "last chance", the race for dux bids fair to be a most exciting one. The leaders are, if possible in better form than before, while many girls are making a huge effort which will make the winning of the dux prize no easy task! Preparations are now being made for our Sports Day, and altogether I think the girls agree that the Third Term is the busiest and pleasantest of all! ...OBSERVANT".*

Eileen Stomell the "Editress" of the first Westleigh Leisure Hours wrote a school song which, despite being highly derivative, conveys something of the

school spirit that marked Westleigh College during most of the 1920s.

### School Song.

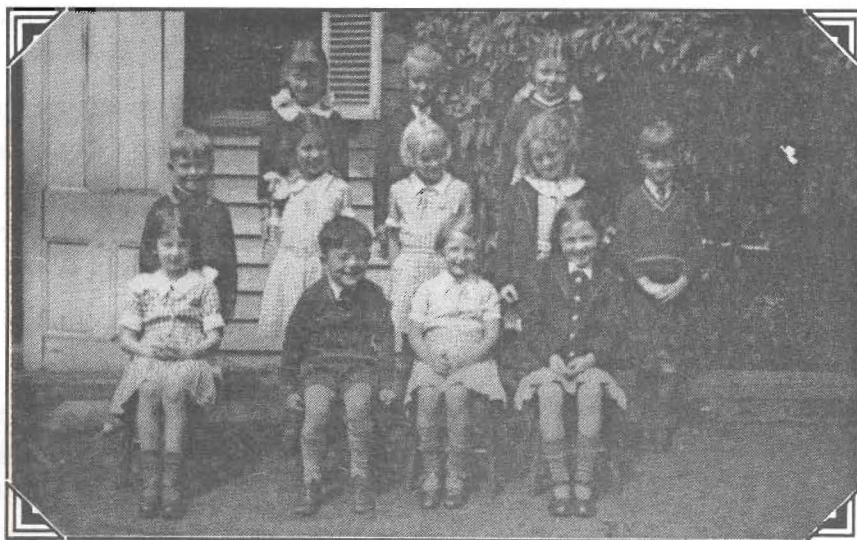
(Written by E. Slomell).

*Ye scholars of our college  
Who honor Westleigh's name,  
Follow the sporting motto:  
"Play up and play the game!"  
We are not always perfect,  
At times we break a rule,  
But the thing that really matters  
Is the honour of the school.*

*For every girl is needed  
And no one is too small  
To bring our college honour  
Should be the aim of all.  
So let us pull together,  
And by our actions teach  
That "Each for All's" our motto,  
And also "All for Each!"*

*Three cheers for Westleigh College,  
And for the teachers, too,  
And for the many scholars  
Who have its good in view.*

However, there were clouds on the horizon and by the late 1920s the effects of the Depression were beginning to be felt in Northcote, a forerunner of the difficult times ahead for the suburb and the school in the 1930s.



---

## 4. *The Everards to the Rescue*

Since its foundation Westleigh College had been a picture of stability and prosperity with the Westgarths dominating the first thirty years of the school and their proteges, Miss Gresham and Miss Rayment, guiding the school through the 1920s. However, the 1930s, ushered in by the Depression and culminating in the onset of World War II, saw Westleigh experience a period of instability in ownership, staffing and student numbers. This, in turn, affected the quality of the education provided.

After the joint principalship of Miss Kate Gresham and Miss Elsie Rayment during the 1920s, Mrs. Isobel Flynn, who had been teaching at the school during the twenties, became Principal around 1930. Mrs. Flynn, a war widow, had become close to the Misses Rayment, living with them in the school residence during the week and returning to her own home in St. Kilda on weekends. Thus Mrs. Flynn kept alive the Westleigh tradition of a succession of principals from within the school.

School reports of the time indicate that Mrs. Flynn remained principal until Term II 1934. However, from Term III 1934 the school experienced a period of instability with the position of principal being filled by M.M. Cannon B.A., Dip.Ed. and S. Warren from Term II 1935 to Term I 1936. During this period Mrs C. Dunstan filled the position of Headmistress of the school. As there is no record of M.M. Cannon or S. Warren actually teaching at Westleigh it is most likely that they were non-teaching principals, leaving the day to day running of the school to Mrs. Dunstan.

Recollections by former students convey something of the instability of the period with frequent changes of staff and concern by parents about the standards of education. The declining standards of the school, together with the difficult economic circumstances, led to children being

withdrawn from the school, either to attend another school or to search for work. Given this situation it is not surprising that former students recalled Mrs. Dunstan really struggling to cope with the different levels she had to teach as well as running the school.

Attracting and maintaining student numbers appeared to be a major problem during the 1930s. One attempt to bolster student numbers was the establishment of a kindergarten in a hall belonging to the Anglican Church at the corner of High St and Tyler St, Preston. It was hoped to attract students for the school from the expanding areas of Regent and Preston. This annexe, run by Miss Perrot, only ever had about a dozen young girls and was eventually forced to close.

The few remaining pupils were then transferred to the main school in James St. There the room which had served as a dormitory until the 1920s was used during most of the thirties for music, singing, needlework and other practical activities.

The period of instability came to an end in Term II 1936 when Clarice Everard became Principal of Westleigh. While Miss Lillian and Miss Clarice were joint Principals of the school for the next twenty-five years, it was the younger Miss Clarice who signed the reports as Principal in the first few years.



*Miss Clarice at Sports 1949*



The Everard sisters, Lillian and Clarice, came with good credentials for running a small, private, mainly girls' school such as Westleigh. They were the daughters of John Everard who came to Port Phillip in the 1840s. He became a stockbroker and was appointed Member for Collingwood in the first Victorian Parliament. John Everard had five children by his first marriage and four daughters by his second marriage of whom three eventually became involved with Westleigh: Lillian, Edith and Clarice. The Everard sisters attended the Mornington Grammar School and later Lillian and Clarice ran a small "Dames School" in Tanti Avenue, Mornington. This was followed by their purchase in Term III 1919 of the Horton Girl's School in Box Hill for the sum of 120 pounds. Lillian and Clarice ran this school originally in the Methodist Sunday School in Oxford St, Box Hill and from 1922 to 1926 at "Wattle Hall" in Linsley St. Box Hill. The methods of instruction at Horton were common to smaller private schools at the time, including Westleigh.

*Rural school type. Montessori in junior section. Scripture reading and roll-call at morning Assembly. Daily homework always included poetry, spelling, a verse of scripture and history dates to be memorized. Copy-books for handwriting. Nature study and French included in curriculum. Music extra. Exams in reading and recitation given by Rev. H. Lavers. Girls prepared for Junior Public exam (Intermediate). Plenty of Swedish drill and round games, especially in winter.*

Details of the Everard's lives between 1926 and 1937 are sketchy. We know that Lillian had travelled to England certainly during the First World War and possibly again before joining Westleigh. We know also that they lived for a time in Black Rock and

helped rear the twins of their only married sister, Elsie. After considering the purchase of St. Catherine's Toorak, Lillian and Clarice eventually assumed control of Westleigh in 1937. By this time Lillian was sixty and Clarice fifty years of age. Some of the teachers of Westleigh during the thirties were Miss Perrot at the kindergarten in Preston, Miss Abraham (Elocution), Miss Dunstan (General Subjects), Miss Jacka (Physical Culture) and Miss Sinclair who taught music and tennis.

Among the more vivid memories of the 1930s was the transport of children to school by bus in which the older girls had responsibility for the care of the younger ones. More than one former student recalled Gang Gang the parrot who would disturb Miss Clarice's classes with his shrieking until he was allowed to perch on her shoulder where he would proceed to pull out the pins from Miss Clarice's hair until it fell, almost wantonly, about her shoulders. Many students recalled that French was taught from kindergarten to the highest grades. This language teaching provided a distinctive element in the curriculum as generations of Westleigh students learned that "Madame Sourie aime bien ta mère".

Although Lillian and Clarice did not possess university or teaching qualifications, they had a sound general education, were genteel and caring and, above all, were mature ladies with considerable experience in running private schools. Their positive influence on Westleigh is supported by comments of former students: "I don't think there was any good teaching until the Everards came". "Students were upgraded when Clarice and Lillian came in". Having improved the educational standard of the school by the late thirties, the Everards were to further develop Westleigh during the years of the second World War and beyond.



## 5. *Air Raid Shelters and Oslo Lunches*

Fiercely loyal to God, King and Empire, the Everards sustained Westleigh, its pupils and their parents during the six long years of World War II. The students during those years recalled the many ways in which the war made an impact on their lives at school. One of these were the rehearsals in case of air raids when the students were taken into the cool dark rooms of the Everard's house and told they would be safe there. There was in fact no air raid shelter at the school, the nearest and largest one being at Batman Park, Northcote.

Then there were the Anzac Day Marches, which seemed to take on a specific significance during the war years, as remembered by Barbara Jones: "We each had a spray of flowers and were marched to the RSL monument in Croxton to place them in front of the monument. I can remember the shopkeepers standing out in front watching us march. I can remember Miss Clarice had a hand bell which she would ring when she wished us to stop or go. We did that for years". Even the lunches seemed somehow different during the war. The pupils would normally bring sandwiches for lunch, spread with the precious rationed butter or substitute. Vivid memories persist of those special monthly tuck shop days when mouth-watering sausage rolls, pies and pasties were for sale in the shelter shed.

Although the one tuckshop day per month for Westleigh pupils could not be regarded as excessive, there was a general concern about the diet of Northcote children during the war. Therefore in July 1944 the Opportunity Club and one of its members, R.P. Tharratt, sponsored a program of supplying and subsidising the cost of Oslo lunches, consisting of wholemeal bread, cheese, mixed salads, an apple and a pint a milk. By November the scheme had been extended to a number of Northcote schools, including Westleigh.

In an echo of Westleigh's involvement in patriotic concerts during World War I, the school participated in a similar event in the Melbourne Town Hall, 5 & 6 April, 1940: a Grand Schools Fete in aid of the Red Cross Australian Comforts Fund. As well as running a stall, Westleigh students performed dancing and singing items.

The war also seemed to influence the choice of stories and poems read to the students, particularly by Miss Lillian. They marvelled at the brave feats of the British kings and queens such as Alfred the Great and Boadicea. Even the non-British Horatius, who kept the bridge, and Leonidas, who defeated the Spartans, were worthy of our admiration for their victories against overwhelming odds.



*Miss Lillian leading the Anzac Day March – 1955*



The war years also saw some educational innovations at Westleigh. One of these was the introduction of two houses, Westgarth and Thornton for sporting competition within the school. Westgarth was named, of course, after the founders of the school and Thornton was named after Canon Thornton a friend of the school from the nearby Church of the Epiphany.

The introduction of houses made sports days at McDonnell Park that much keener with the goal of winning those gleaming silver cups tied with the green or pink ribbons. Westleigh also played basketball against other private schools, although more by arrangement than a regular fixture.

Some of the longest serving teachers in the history of Westleigh started at the school in the early war years. One of those was Miss Hazel Goddard, a recently graduated art teacher, who commenced at Westleigh in 1940 and who remained a loyal and dedicated art teacher until its closure in 1961. So young was Miss Goddard at the time that she

recalled Miss Lillian Saying "Where's Miss Goddard? Oh, there she is ...I thought she was one of the girls".

Other teachers during the war years included Miss Hopton (Physical Culture), Madam Northcote (Singing), Mrs. Green (French), Mrs. Lethbridge (Sport) and Mrs. O'Hare who taught kindergarten and French. And, of course, Misses Lillian and Clarice who taught general subjects to the middle and senior schools respectively.

The curriculum appeared to be little changed from the thirties with major emphasis being placed on literature, especially the learning of poems by heart; history, British of course; geography, especially capital cities; spelling, arithmetic, and various forms of handicraft. Extensive reading continued to be encouraged, especially of Whitcombe and Tomks grade readers. While the girls did sewing of various sorts, the boys made tea pot stands out of pine needles and raffia. This came after the unisex pigtails that all students in the kindergarten made out of pieces of wool knitted with the aid of a cotton reel, four nails and half a knitting needle. These too were sewn into tea pot stands.

The school numbers continued to taper off in the senior forms with only small numbers attempting their Intermediate Certificate and even fewer, Leaving and Matriculation.

The culmination of the school year was, of course, Speech Night when girls would wear their best white dresses and be allowed a touch of lipstick and boys would wear white shirts and school ties. Singing and physical culture items and little plays were presented during the first part of the evening, followed by the more formal prize giving after interval. While Westleigh was a competitive school, it was also a rewarding one with prizes, cups and certificates being awarded generously on Speech Nights.

The following letter from Miss Clarice congratulating one of her students on gaining her Intermediate conveys much of the Everards' attitudes towards their pupils and their education:



*Miss Goddard & Tennis Team C. 1946*

Westleigh College,  
James St.,  
Northcote, N. 16.  
Jan. 14<sup>th</sup> 1941

Dear dear,

Though glad you have your  
Intermediate, there is something  
that delights me more.

When it was necessary to show  
you your faults, like a true  
little "Anger" you faced  
and scaled your cliff - no  
return to safety and ease for you  
and you reached your objective  
too, because you yielded to  
discipline.

You will never return to the  
"old" ways again. You have  
in you by made an advance.

I must to thank you too,  
for your wonderful help on  
Speed Night. You were so  
calm and controlled.

My love dear,

Yr sincere friend,  
Flance Howard.

The Everards are warmly remembered by students at the school during the war years. Perhaps this too was the Everards "Finest Hour": "They were kind ...they were very out going people". "My feeling towards them is one of affection, warmth and approachability". "As a child I admired them both ...they were very kind to both mother and me when father was at the war".

When peace was declared in 1945 a senior student recalls that they were not allowed to join the public celebrations in the streets, but had to finish their examination instead. However, Westleigh had cause to celebrate, led by the indomitable Everards the school had survived the war years and was poised to enter yet another phase in its development.

Westleigh College,  
James Street,  
Northcote.  
10-1-41

900 3410  
My dear Rosemary,

Thank you dear for the card. I  
am glad you are having a lovely  
time. I am very, very proud of  
you passing in my three subjects &  
A.T.

Now - forget all about study &  
teachers & just be happy & free.  
I'd love to you & your Mother,

Love, as ever,  
Flance Howard.



## 6. The Westleigh Community

The post-war years were ones of reconstruction and renewal for Westleigh College. This was achieved by the establishment of a Westleigh College Parents' Association at the very end of the war. The first President of the Parents' Association was a uniformed Captain Bone who held the position for only a short time. The second President was Mr. Joseph Batrouney who held the position from 1945 to 1956. He was succeeded by Mr. Dean who remained until just before the closure of the school.

The reports of the Parents Association written by the Secretary Mrs. J. Mottram from November 1957 to May 1961 in the "Westleigh Collegian" tell of the functions arranged and the support given by parents to the school. For a number of years the three main events were the Annual Ball the Fashion Parade and a School Bazaar.

While it was acceptable for girls to bring "nice" boys along as partners to the Annual Ball, it was also common to see girls dancing with each other. The last Head Prefect, Jeannie Smith, claims that this has had a permanent effect on her dancing in that to this day she still wants to lead!

A number of working bees were held each year. Mrs Mottram reports on the working bee held 15 November, 1958:

*"New seats and tables were built, old ones were mended, spouting was cleaned, door catches were repaired, etc. Needless to say the Principals were thrilled to have this work attended to, thanks again Dads".*

In 1959 the sizable sum of 159 pounds was spent on repairs and improvements to the school.

The fundraising and working bees must have been particularly welcomed by the Misses Everard as their fees were modest and the demands of preparing even a few senior girls for external examinations meant the hiring of specialist

teachers. A series of school accounts from the period indicate that term fees ranged from 2 pounds fifteen shillings & sevenpence in 1945 to seven pounds eleven shillings & sixpence in 1951. The latter account included 2 shillings for fuel for the heater.

A list of fees for different levels at girls private schools as at January 1947 reveal that Westleigh fees were certainly modest.

THE College is situated in James Street in the highest and healthiest part of Northcote. It has a good playground and tennis court, and is close to both tram and train. The class rooms are spacious, well lighted and well ventilated.

The studies of the pupils include all the usual subjects of modern primary education, and the methods of instruction are thoroughly up-to-date. Religious and moral training are matters of earnest consideration with the Principal, who desires above all that the pupils should become good citizens of the Empire.

Sport is encouraged as a means of healthy exercise, and also to promote the sense of good comradeship and fair play.

Physical Culture is undertaken by expert visiting teachers. Children are educated up to the sub-primary standard at the Preston Branch, Corner of Tyler and High Streets, and from there pass on to the Primary School at Northcote. *Jerry Kinder - Principal, Miss S. J. Warren, B.A., Dip. Ed. gates to School leaving Honours*

### SCALE OF FEES PER TERM (Payable in Advance.)

Under 8 years	£2 2 0
8, 9, 10 years	2 10 0
11, 12 years	3 10 0
Over 12 years	4 10 0
<i>4/6</i>	
Kindergarten materials or stationery, 3/-	
Hatband, 3/6.      Badge, 2/0.	
Elocution	£1 1 0
Special Drawing	1 1 0
Music	1 5 0
Class Singing	2/- & 3/-
Class Drawing	2 0
Physical Culture	5 0
Tennis	5 0

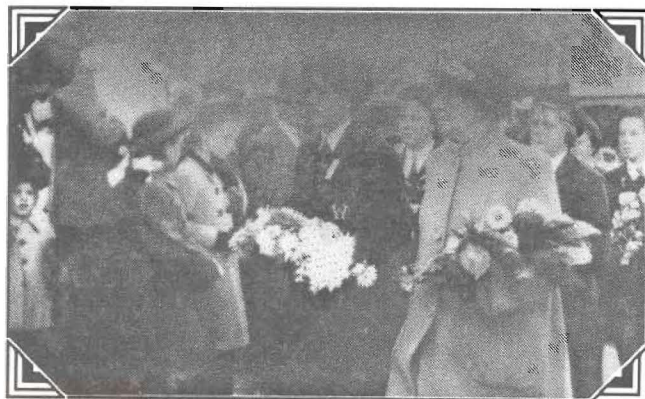
A Term's notice or a Half Term's Fee is required before the removal of a Pupil.

*Miss Everard*

Principal, Miss S. J. Warren, B.A., Dip. Ed.

### Prospectus C. 1940

Both change and continuity could be discerned in the school activities in post-war years. Among the changes were more frequent excursions and even a camp at Harrierville for senior girls, the introduction of the "Westleigh Collegian", the first school magazine since "Westleigh Leisure Hours", and the employment of specialist teachers to meet the demands of new curriculum developments in the 1950s.



Anzac Day 1950

# Mestleigh



# College

We, the undersigned, offer to  
 J. Batrouney, President, Parents' Association 1945-1956  
 our grateful appreciation of your service to our school.

- |                 |              |               |                 |                 |
|-----------------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| P. Shaw         | B. Stach.    | G. Sinclair.  | L. Tippet.      | L. Thorp        |
| L. Healey.      | L. Graham.   | J. Baker.     | L. Shaw.        | C. Reddick.     |
| J. Swift.       | L. Dean.     | R. Peal.      | A. McRitchie    | S. Parker       |
| V. Willis.      | J. Dunstone. | M. Kilpatrick | J. Courmay.     | C. Almond.      |
| J. Martin       | B. Wing      | P. Rush.      | J. Roodknights. | P. Graham.      |
| J. Thomson.     | C. Duffield  | V. Clarke.    | M. Rushforth.   | L. Patchett     |
| L. Morrison     | C. Stealy    | V. Miller.    | M. Ward         | A. Crossley     |
| M. Grandin.     | P. Crawford. | O. Hataj.     | M. Gawell.      | L. McRitchie.   |
| J. Dwyer.       | J. McMan.    | R. Thunders.  | J. Macknamara.  | C. Macknamara.  |
| J. Smith        | E. Matthews  | J. Granger.   | C. Hammerley.   | C. Priest.      |
| L. Campbell.    | O. Waller.   | J. Sanders.   | M. Watt.        | K. Tippet.      |
| E. C. Trimmshaw | S. Potts     | M. Wheeler.   | E. Kirschfeld   | R. Shevan       |
| J. Doupis.      | L. Gompston. | E. Wrayte.    | E. Crawley      | C. Buckerton    |
| J. Buckingham   | B. Levin     | C. Kinnon     | J. Parker       | M. Braianis     |
| L. Brien.       | D. Jussaby.  | B. Shirley.   | L. Conway.      | J. McAtkars     |
| J. Brien        | C. Bachelor  | L. Smith.     | G. Constantine  | V. Conway       |
| J. Duffield.    | L. Langman   | C. Frost      | E. Durrant      | D. Lehmann      |
| C. Lehmann      | H. Jones     | S. Ryan.      | C. Hill.        | O. Watts        |
| C. Morrison     | A. Smith     | L. Corling    | S. J. J. J. J.  | L. Braianis     |
| L. Eastman      | J. Ford      | M. Gratton    | E. Herman       | R. Kirschfeldt  |
| A. Kellwell     | K. Law.      | B. McBrain    | C. McFarlane    | C. Palmer       |
| M. Richards     | P. Thaxpe    | W. Lvester    | J. Micker       | M. Buckingham   |
| C. Beut         | R. Edwards   | K. Martin     | K. Cottam       | G. Lacey        |
| M. Williamson   | C. Wrayte    | M. Zydover.   | L. Frost.       | G. Ball         |
| P. Kentaj       | J. Kinnon    | L. Little     | S. Hanson.      | L. Pinnick      |
| J. Smith        | J. Wood.     | C. Wiate      | M. Thornton.    | E. Shuttleworth |
| B. McKinnon     | L. Moore     | C. Bakan      | L. Hebris       | L. Hebris       |
| L. Felton       | L. Tobin     | L. McKinnon   | M. Douglas      | C. Ford         |
| K. Hinkley      | J. Bunting   | L. Eppitt     | K. Rindick      | L. Lacey.       |
| E. Jacobs.      | C. White     | J. Essential  | J. Gilbert      | M. Jyrell       |
| L. Recater      | J. Enqverson | J. Ireland    | M. Petersen     | L. Vautin       |
| G. Shacklock    | J. Barrows.  | G. Langman    | D. Garfield     | J. Langman.     |



However, visitors to the school in the 1950s would have been more struck by a certain timeless quality about the school. They would have witnessed the morning assembly with the recitation of the Lord's Prayer and a Psalm (always the Twenty Third or Ninety First) as well as the unison greeting "Good Morning Miss Everard". They would have noted a remarkable continuity of staff with Miss Hopton still taking physical culture in the hall, Madam Northcote, accompanied by Mrs. Clarke, still teaching singing and of course Miss Goddard the Art teacher. Miss Pohlner had taken over from Mrs. O'Hare in the kindergarten, Mrs. Oliver was in charge of junior school and Mrs. Mason taught science and accompanied the seniors on many of their excursions.

By the mid 1950s Miss Clarice, some ten years younger than Miss Lillian, had become the dominant figure at the school. Miss Lillian, with rimless glasses on nose, was finding it increasingly difficult to continue teaching. "Don't be tempted to talk, girls" she would say, amidst uproar. By the late 1950s Miss Lillian was confined to the house while Matron (Miss Edith) a robust figure was still feeding her beloved pigeons and tending to cut knees and heads caused by frequent falls on the pebbled yard.

Visitors to the school would also see little change in the Speech Nights and Anzac Day marches to the Cenotaph, although one or more senior girls would also lay a wreath at the Shrine of Remembrance. The charities which were still supported with weekly collections were the Red Cross, Blind Babies and an annual egg appeal. The editorials written by senior girls in the Westleigh Collegian reflected an awareness of issues such as race relations, war, the impact of television and problems of the handicapped. However, the tradition of loyalty to the Royal Family continued to be powerfully present at Westleigh, reaching a crescendo on the occasion of the Queen's Tour in March, 1954. The Leader Budget (7.12.54) described how Westleigh managed to demonstrate its loyalty and affection for the Queen during her first tour -

*"The College when the Queen was due last year, could not get a strong post. So it just went out into High St and commandeered sufficient room for its 180 pupils. It had written to the Queen congratulating her on her splendid example to youth and the Queen remembered the name which was splashed on a most modern banner strung right across High St. The Royal car slowed and the school's head prefect, fair-haired Valerie McKenzie handed the Duke of Edinburgh a lovely bouquet of Peace roses. The Duke handed them to the Queen and it was a highly gratified Valerie who heard the Queen say "They're exquisite". The spirit which this incident portrays is the spirit of the old school itself. In spite of its quaint venerable atmosphere it gets results".*



Although a fence had been built around the kindergarten and new seats built, the shadow stick was still in place on the north side of the building. So too were the pine trees and the great peppercorn tree, planted by William Rucker in the 1840s as part of the garden of his mansion.

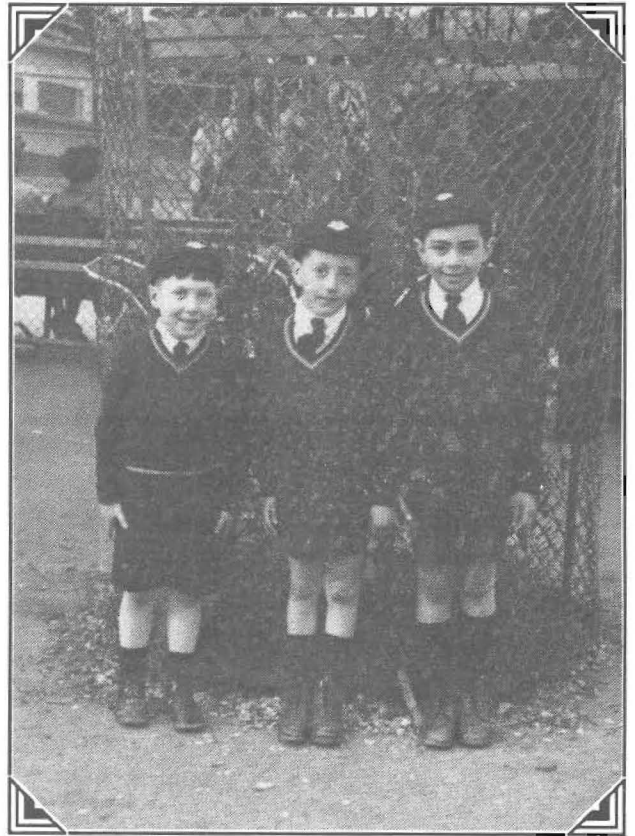


The senior girls, requiring library and study facilities, were now admitted to the sanctuary of the Everard's house where a small library was maintained and where, in winter, the seniors could keep warm by the fire and toast their sandwiches.

Although the school did appear to have a timeless quality about it and although the students would not have realised it, by the end of the fifties Westleigh's days were numbered.



*1950s*



*And there were Boys as well! 1957*

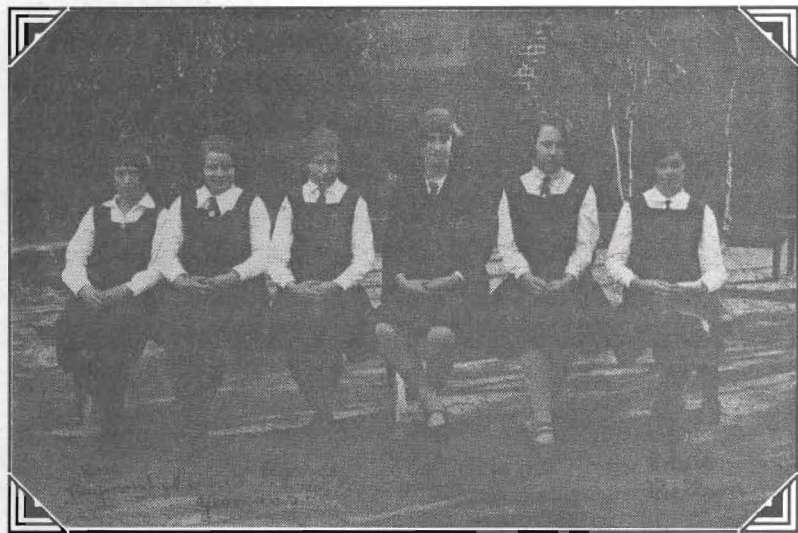


*Class of '59*



## 7. *The Fall of the Peppercorn Tree*

By the 1950s the changes taking place both in society at large and in the suburbs of Northcote were unfavourable to the continued survival of a small private school such as Westleigh.



*Seniors in 1929*

The decline of the High Street shopping centre had already begun with newer shops opening in Preston and beyond. Even the Royal Tour of 1954 was used as a High Street promotion. The Leader Budget ran a "Brighten Up Campaign" and there was a parade of eleven floats decorated with 44 beauty contestants the evening before the Royal Tour. However, to little avail. Younger people were moving out of the area to buy houses in newer suburbs. For example, of the 52 marriages solemnized in the Epiphany Church in 1959 only one couple settled in Northcote (*Lemon 1953:253*).

By the late 1950s Northcote's population was predominantly working class, older, with increasing numbers of post-war immigrants, particularly from Italy and Greece.

Not only did Westleigh survive the 1950s but it had a matriculation class in 1959 consisting of Loreen Thorpe, Ann McRitchie, Lyndall Dean and Rosemary Veal, all of whom

studied the same course: English Expression and Literature, Art, French and British History. Miss Clarice took all subjects apart from Art which was taught by Miss Goddard.

However, the signs were there that the school's days were numbered. From a peak of 180 pupils in 1954 the numbers had dropped to between 80-90 in 1961. At this stage the kindergarten and grades one, two and three had been consolidated.

Miss Lillian was no longer involved in the school, Matron, who was now 80 years of age, had never assumed any major teaching responsibility so it all fell to Miss Clarice who, at the age of seventy, was endeavouring not only to run the school but to teach four subjects at Matriculation level.

The coup de grace for Westleigh occurred when the seriously overworked Miss Clarice had her first heart attack in April, 1961.

From her sick bed Miss Clarice would tell the senior prefect, Jeannie Smith, what to teach the seniors. While teachers such as Miss Hopton, Miss Goddard and Mrs Oliver remained loyal to the end, there was no way Westleigh could continue. The tradition was broken.



*The Last Matriculation Class 1959*



No longer was there a teacher or former student who could take over the school. Matron told Jeannie Smith of her intention to close the school after Jeannie had completed her leaving examinations. It was Mrs Oliver's task to write to the parents and Jeannie Smith's responsibility to buy the last set of prizes for the last Speech Day. This was a modest affair in which Matron distributed the prizes in the hall and, shortly after its last Speech Day, the school was closed.

By 1961 Lillian was 84, Matron, 81 and Clarice 74 years of age. They had continued to run the school until they literally dropped. With masterly British understatement, Matron explained the close of the school to the local paper: "It's a shame we have to leave but the school is proving a bit much for my sisters and me now".

During their twenty-five years at the school the lives and work of the Everards expressed a number of powerful values which, in turn, they instilled in their students: care and responsibility for others; morality; loyalty; courtesy and manners; and the value of educating women: *"If you educate a boy you educate one person. If you educate a girl you educate a family"*.

Regretfully retirement at their beloved Warrandyte house was short lived for the Everards. In 1962 a fire gutted their little house destroying any records and memorabilia that they had kept from their beloved Westleigh.

Lillian spent her last days in a hospital at East Melbourne until her death on 13 June, 1962 and Clarice died after a second heart attack on 14 December of the same year. Only Edith survived to live in a rebuilt house in Warrandyte

until her death on 12 May, 1970.

Although an infant school was opened at Westleigh in 1962, it was short lived and this attempt to revive Westleigh did not succeed.

At the end of November 1964, just three years after the closure of the school, the Everard's house and the school buildings were demolished, and the trees cut down, including the great peppercorn tree which had stood on Rucker's Hill for over a century.

## The last day at Westleigh



MISS EDITH EVERARD, one of three sisters who have run Westleigh College, Northcote, since 1935, gathered these children round her yesterday at Speech Day and told them she had to say goodbye for always. For the college is closing down.

With her above are from left, Steven Rushen, Gregory Marshall, Lynda Halliwell and Debra McDonald, first and second grade pupils.

Three sisters, Mrs Lillian Everard and Miss Clarice Everard, co - principals, and Miss Edith Everard, have run the college for a third of its 75-year life.

White - haired Miss Edith Everard said: "It's a shame we have to leave but the school is proving a bit much for my sisters and me now." The sisters plan to retire to a cottage in Warrandyte.



# WESTLEIGH COLLEGE, NORTHCOTE



## CERTIFICATE

Awarded to Graeme Eddy  
 For Passing Final Examinations

December, 1946

Principal Flora Evers  
*Lilian Evers*

WESTLEIGH COLLEGE,  
 NORTHCOTE.

Report of Morven Fairman

Class V Term III 1923

SUBJECT.	Exam. Marks (Maximum 100)	Average per cent. throughout	REMARKS
Order Sport			More tennis practice needed. Keenly interested in all sports. 39
READING <u>Kniging</u>			Prize.
SPELLING ...	<u>100</u>		
WRITING ...			
GRAMMAR ...	<u>93</u>		
ENG. HISTORY	<u>97</u>		
CIVICS ...			
LITERATURE	<u>96</u>		
ROMAN HISTORY			
GEOGRAPHY	<u>94</u>		
ARITHMETIC	<u>93</u>		
ALGEBRA ...	<u>98</u>		
FRENCH ...	<u>97</u>		
LATIN ...	<u>100</u>		
BOTANY ...	<u>100</u>		
PHYSIOLOGY	<u>99</u>		
NATURE STUDY			
PHYSICAL CULTURE			Excellent work. 7/10
ELOCUTION...			Excellent work. Special prize.
MUSIC ...			90 Excellent work, prize winner. P.S.
DRAWING ...			96 Excellent. Prize won.
NEEDLEWORK			
SCRIPTURE			
CONDUCT ...			

Total Number of Marks 1053  
 Average for Term 96  
 Average for Year 96

ATTENDANCE.—Maximum 28 Half Days; Present 25 Half Days.

PRINCIPALS:

Kah Gresham  
Clare A. Rayment

### REFERENCES

LEMON A. **The Northcote Side of the River.**

Hargreen Publishing Company,  
 Melbourne, 1983.

SWIFT W.A. **Northcote From its First Settlement to a City.**

Leader Publishing Company,  
 Northcote, 1928

WESTLEIGH COLLEGIAN Northcote, November, 1957 - May 1961.

WESTLEIGH LEISURE HOURS Three Editions, Undated, 1922, August, 1923.

Other sources consisted of miscellaneous newspaper clippings, concert programs, photographs, letters, school reports and accounts.

WESTLEIGH COLLEGE, NORTHCOTE

FORMER STUDENTS' REUNION

Held at Art Collection Gallery Restaurant,

312 High St, Northcote

11th October, 1991



