

IRENE WESCOTT: SENIOR MISTRESS 1970s



Irene Wescott was a western suburbs girl from her childhood, so she would have fitted in well with the district. Irene Alfreda Wescott was born in the 1920s. Her parents were Alfred Edward Burkitt and Florence Irene Burton who married in 1924 and raised two children: a daughter Irene Alfreda, and a son Edward.

Alfred Burkitt was born in 1897 in Taranaki, New Zealand, but his family background goes back to the 1830s in Barnoldby le Beck, Lincolnshire, England. The Florence Burton's family origins have been hard to trace but they might have been from Thaxted, Essex, England, in the late 1700s.

Alfred Edward Burkitt worked as a butcher. The family were living in Echuca in the early 1920s before moving to Healesville, and they finally settled in North Footscray in the 1930s.

In 1935 Irene received some educational recognition in an Essay competition for Religious Instruction in the Intermediate section. She attended the Williamstown High School in the late 1930s and some photos of her from that era have survived.



Irene Burkitt (front row 2nd from right) Williamstown High 1938.

She attended MacRobertson Girls High School and in 1941 obtained an Ormond College Scholarship in the non-residential exhibition for European/British History. (Argus 1941)

Sadly, her father passed way in 1943 at the family home in Footscray, at the young age of 46 years.

Irene studied at Melbourne Teachers College and received her T.P.T.C. in 1946. (The Trained Primary Teacher's Certificate was a two-year course undertaken by students intending to teach general subjects at any level in a primary school.) She also obtained her Bachelor of Arts degree from Melbourne University in 1946. In 1949 she upgraded her teacher accreditation with a Diploma of Education, also from Melbourne University.

Irene Alfreda Burkitt of Gordon Street, Footscray, became engaged to Percival Clarence Wescott of Batman Street, Footscray, in 1949, and they married in the following year. She was a teacher, he was a turner. They made their home in North Footscray and raised three children: Ron, Geoff, and Jan. Irene would later relate that as a young mum with three children under five she enjoyed going along to the 1956 Olympic Games and cheering for the Aussies. By 1963 they had moved to Ballarat Road, Sunshine. A decade later (October 1973) Percival passed away at the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital, and was buried at the Altona Memorial Park. (He had enlisted for WW2 service from Port Moresby, New Guinea, but his service records are not published.)

Irene Wescott started as Senior Mistress at St Albans High School in 1970. Unfortunately, the available school magazines of this period do not have much information about teachers - two of her contributions are included below. Irene Wescott moved to Williamstown Girls High School later in the 1970s, as Luba Uwarow worked there and remembers Mrs Wescott being there as Principal.

A THOUGHT From the Senior Mistress

Thank you, Magazine Committee, for giving me the opportunity to write a few words at the close of my first year at St. Albans High School. Because I hope to spend many more years here, years in which I shall know you and St. Albans better, I shall not attempt to make definite and unswerving judgments in this short report. Perhaps in my last year here I shall be telling you that I have learnt as much from the students of St. Albans as I have taught them. That will be the time to see what I have done for the School.

Instead let me ask each of you what your school year of 1970 has meant to you. Will there be anything this year that you will be glad to remember in 1990? I hope so. If it has merely been a year of stumbling and grumbling through each day's classes, longing for the coming weekend or holiday, I pity you. For the competitors who took part in any School sporting teams, for those who spent a week in Ovens Valley for the talented singers, actors and technicians of our musical productions, for the debaters — this year has given some worthy experience. There are others whose activities may not have been noticed beyond their own form, but I am sure that whether they be of Form I or will Form VI, they will feel the year has been of some value because they have been ACTIVE in doing something in our school. Their participation meant enrichment for themselves and St. Albans High.

When printed, this message to you will look very brief. Perhaps I had a motive in making it so short. Can you guess what that motive was? I hoped you would be encouraged by its brevity to read it and determine that you will make next year worthwhile year for you. My best wishes for the future go to those who are leaving. Happy Holidays to those who will again be part of St. Albans in 1971.

Mrs. I. A. Wescott.
Senior Mistress, 1970



Irene Wescott, 2006.

To the Students of St. Albans High School

"It is not the place that decorates the man, but the man who does that to a place."

Recent surveys by sociologists have revealed that St. Albans is one of the least desirable residential areas in Melbourne. How did they arrive at this conclusion? Have they noticed the large number of houses that are being erected in the area. Did they come to St. Albans, interview the inhabitants and see the facilities offering, or did they issue a questionnaire to a group of people, place the results in a computer and so come up with a list of socially desirable areas? It is most likely that the computer analysing the answers placed St. Albans on the lowest rung of the social ladder.

What is wrong with St. Albans that it has to be labelled so? The standard of housing is at least the equivalent of the majority of Melbourne suburbs, the people take a pride in their gardens, roads are good, it is well catered for with shops and schools—there are no slums, no housing commission flats and no reputation for crime and violence. One obvious factor that could react against St. Albans is probably geographical—it is situated on bare wind-swept plain, treeless and monotonous in outlook. However, most people who decry St. Albans have not been here, lived here, or known people in this area—they judge St. Albans by the sociologists' report and the reputation gained from that finding. A short time ago, in the daily bulletin the "thought for the day" read, "a good reputation lies asleep

but a bad one runs wild." Unfortunately and without any foundation, St. Albans has a bad reputation and a reputation which students are, obviously, prepared to believe. They excuse any shortcomings with the often quoted "But this Is St. Albans" or "This is typical of St. Albans."

What is wrong with you people? Do you mean that you are not as good as others, that because you live in St. Albans you are an inferior person? If this is to be your attitude, St. Albans will become what people think it is and you will be an inferior person. Remember it is you who "decorates" St. Albans and establishes its reputation. Instead of constantly down-grading your home town, why not speak well of it? Why not do something to make the place more desirable? You can start with the school — take pride in it — see that to outsiders the grounds are neat and tidy. Take a pride in yourself, set a good example and when on excursions remember that the good name of St. Albans is established by you.

We have taught in many schools throughout Victoria and can assure you that apart from your migrant backgrounds and friendly natures, you are no different from other boys and girls. You have the opportunity to make this school as good as, if not better than all others in the State. When will you do something for it? The students make the school, not the buildings, or the equipment, or the teachers. Show that sociologists' surveys cannot measure the quality of the people in an area.

By your thoughtfulness, interest, accomplishments and pride in yourselves show that you are equal to any student, whatever the school may be. Remember that it is you and you alone who can remove the undeserved stigma from St. Albans.

Mrs. I. Wescott, Mr. A. Shaw, Mr. T. Shircore



T. Shircore, I. Wescott, A. Shaw; 1971.



Irene Wescott (centre) at the 50th anniversary celebration 2006.



Irene Wescott (R) with Bruce & Pearl Alcorn at 50th anniversary celebration 2006.

Wescott family background researched and written by Joseph Ribarow.

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