

FABER EST

THE FORTIANS UNION

BULLETIN

Produced for former students of:

- ❖ Fort Street Girls' High School
- ❖ Fort Street Boys' High School
- ❖ Fort Street High School



NUMBER 101

October 2024

Post: The Fortians Union
c/- Fort Street High School
Parramatta Rd, Petersham 2049

Email: fortunion@gmail.com

Annual dinner

The Fortians Union's 2024 annual dinner will be held on **Friday, 18 October**, at Club York, 95-99 York St, Sydney.

Our guest speaker will be **Philippa Scott** (1998) an Inner West councillor and an experienced governance, policy and management professional, committed to social justice.



Philippa Scott

Please arrive by 6:45 for a 7pm start. The cost of the dinner is **\$75 for Members** and \$80 for others. A booking form is attached, or use the link sites.google.com or the QR Code.

Notice of Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the Fortians Union will be held on **Tuesday 22 October, 2024**, from **4pm**, at Fort Street High School. All Executive and Committee positions are open for election. The full notice and **agenda** are on **page 4**. Names of the Interim Committee are listed in brackets.



A fine day at the Fest

It's 175 years since Fort Street school was founded at Observatory Hill, and a Fort Fest celebration on September 20 marked the occasion – our *Dodransbicentennial*. It was colourful, musical – and tasty!

A great turn-out of former and current students, staff and interested community members enjoyed tours of the school, which were booked out before the day, strolling through the school and seeing this wonderful site of public education.

At the Ron Horan Room museum, members of the Union gave information, chatted with many Fortians from over the years and invited our new graduates to join us.

School ensembles presented musical items. Food provided was very special and well enjoyed. A wonderful smoking ceremony by local Indigenous members culminated in dance, with onlookers joining in.

Pictured: Ian McLaughlin, Rod Broune and Pat Arthur, with a 175-years T-shirt.

Margaret made a difference

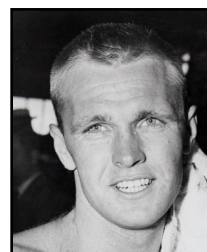
Margaret Lawson ('52) was the Captain of Fort Street Girls' High School. She died on 18th July 2024 aged 88 years. The SMH notice included the quotation:

"Margaret was a Deputy Registrar of the Family Court of Australia, and a former child psychologist at the Children's Hospital (when it was at Camperdown), and was always concerned with the welfare of children. She made a great difference to the lives of many children and adults in both her professional and personal life."

Margaret was a member of the Fortians Union Management Committee from 1993 to 2002, undertaking the duties of President in 1999, 2000 and 2001. In that role, she had to resolve some issues that had arisen during the "Sesqui".

The one to beat

Among Fortians who joined the Union recently is **Jon Henricks** ('53), Olympic gold medallist and one of Australia's great swimmers. At school, Jon was the one to beat, with numerous winner pennants; he won the 440 yards event at the Australian nationals at age 16. He was the "fastest swimmer of his time" when he won the 100m freestyle at the 1956 Olympics. He went to the US to continue his swimming career. A few years ago the Fortians Union bought several of Jon's swimming pennants at an auction and presented them to the Ron Horan Room museum at the school.



Jon Henricks

John asked for more ...

John Chappell ('55) writes: In 1951 I was enrolled at an "inner city" school, where among the usual, I mystifyingly learnt Technical Drawing and Woodwork for two or three years. As my studies terminated at the Intermediate Certificate, like Oliver Twist I asked for more, and sought admission to Fort Street Boys' High for Years 4 and 5. This was not automatic, but I was admitted, and I am thankful for the teaching I received at the "Fort ". For my sins, I went to Teachers' College, and was sent to a one-teacher school, but having matriculated, I attended UNSW as an evening student, and similarly, as a postgraduate, at the Ku-ring-gai College of Advanced Education. I want to acknowledge the irreplaceable opportunity afforded me from my high school education, at Taverners Hill.

Jan's nightmarish sojourn

Nine years after leaving Fort Street, schoolteacher **Jan Wilson** ('55) found herself in jail, at the centre of an international political scandal behind the Iron Curtain. Jan has now written a book, titled "Deported: Passport Not Valid For CSSR ", in which she recounts her "unexpected adventures in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic".

In 1964, Jan was teaching in Vienna when she was drawn into an attempt with three other young activists to rescue a Hungarian sculptor, Tibor Karman, from the clutches of the then Communist-ruled Czechoslovakia then known as the CSSR. The attempt was doomed to failure, jettisoning them into a nightmarish sojourn deep in the heart of the Bratislava justice system, and triggering the interest of international news agencies and ASIO.

Jan's book is available at Gleebooks, Abbeys and other bookstores.

Firebrand Merle's day at the bar

Merle Thornton, *nee* Wilson ('48) who died in August aged 93, was made a member of the Order of Australia for service as an advocate for women and Indigenous rights, and to the arts as a writer and director.

She established the Equal Opportunities Association For Women, which helped to deliver paid maternity leave, better childcare options, and reform for women's rights in the public service.

Here is an abridged obituary from the Sydney Morning Herald by author Peter Craven.

When Merle Thornton and Ro Bognor chained themselves to the rail of the public bar in Brisbane's Regatta Hotel in 1965 and demanded they be served beers there like the blokes, it made global news.

Merle was a feminist and a firebrand stirrer of such note that historian Marilyn Lake has said the famed bar protest "presaged a new phase in the history of feminism".

The press were there to record the show: they'd cottoned on to the fact that the law did not prevent the consumption of the beer but just the service.

A week later, a second protest was staged, with reinforcements. The ABC sent a *Four Corners* team. Needless to say, Merle was banned from the Regatta. But this time the suffragettes brought their own bottles of beer to expose the fact that an anachronistic law was deliberately being broken. But with the passage of years the hotel now graciously acknowledges the woman who gave the place its niche in national mythology.

Merle was born in Melbourne during the Depression but the family soon moved to Sydney where she had no trouble getting into that exclusive, selectively streamed government college, Fort Street Girls' High School. At 18, Merle enrolled to study English literature at Sydney University.

future Labor leader and governor-general Bill Hayden, who Merle convinced to introduce a bill that repealed the marriage bar provisions which she considered such an iniquity.

Heading for London, she decided in 1966 to study the philosophy of language at University College London.



Merle fronts the bar again at a gathering 55 years later.

In 1951, Merle met Neil Thornton, who shared her convictions and social engagement. They married in 1953.

Soon Merle also saw herself with piercing clarity as the victim of a barbarous anti-women law. Working as a graduate in the office of the ABC general manager, she was compelled to conceal her marriage well into her pregnancy. In 1956 a woman's right to work was terminated on her marriage .

A postgraduate research posting from the ANU triggered a move to Canberra, where daughter Sigrid (yes, the famous actor) was born. The family moved back to Brisbane when Neil took up a university lectureship, and Merle undertook postgrad research in philosophy.

One of Neil's students was

She campaigned for proper sex education for girls, fought for access to abortions and the necessity of seeing women's studies as integral to the life of the mind and the idea of the university. She also fought like a lioness against the Vietnam War and was arrested a number of times. Merle was a born troublemaker; she would not pipe down for anyone.

Merle was a talented writer of fiction; her play, *Playing Mothers And Fathers*, was staged in 1990, and she wrote a number of episodes of the famed TV show *Prisoner*.

The Queensland Government has pledged to erect a statue in honour of Merle, as "a symbol of strength and determination and an inspiration to those who see it".

Notice of Annual General Meeting of The Fortians Union

The Annual General Meeting of The Fortians Union will be held on **Tuesday 22 October, 2024**, at Fort Street High School **from 4:00**. All Executive and Committee positions are open for election. Below is the agenda. The Interim Committee are listed in brackets.

1. Minutes of the previous Annual General Meeting (30 September, 2023)
and the General Meeting (2 July, 2024).
2. President's Report.
3. Other Reports, call for by the President.
4. Treasurer's Report.
5. Election of Executive Officers and Committee: (Names of those on the interim committee are listed in brackets.)
 - a) President (Glenn Maddock, 1977)
 - b) Vice-President, Male (Rod Broune, 1975)
 - c) Vice-President, Female (Margot Cooper, 1975)
 - d) Secretary (Don Newby, 1967)
 - e) Treasurer (Paul Steenson, 1967)
 - f) Committee Members (Alan Allison 1967, Julia Bovard 1965, Maria Castellanos 1975, Gordon Hill 1962, Julie Ivison 1965, Ian McLaughlin 1973, Helen Sarantopoulos 1988, Adam Tan 1991).
6. Election of Patrons: A new nomination being brought forward only by the Committee; (Prof. Maria Skyllas Kazacos, Mr Michael Kirby, Mr Ian Cohen.)
7. Appointment of other Office Holders: School Liaison Officer; a Principal's Delegate; Auditor; Honorary Solicitor (no appointment for all).
8. Determination of Membership Fees: (\$50, with 2 payments of \$25 for students and pensioners. The first year after leaving school continues to be free.)
9. Such other business as the retiring committee may previously have decided should be dealt with or ratified by the Annual General Meeting provided that it has been specified in the Agenda.
10. Change to the Constitution: Clause 5 (a) Delete the words "during the month of October in each year" **and replace them with** "within 6 months of the last day of the Union's Financial Year".
11. General Business

If you would like to nominate, or provide a Postal Vote for either yourself or another Union Member, for any position, please submit this in writing, to the email address fortianunion@bigpond.com, to be received by **Friday, 18 October 2024**.