



KENTIAN SOCIETY

SUPPORTING KENT STREET SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Newsletter

August 2025

Planes, Trains and Submarines

Kent Street Senior High School. August, 1959.

Feeling weighed down by his thoughts, 15-year-old Lloyd dragged his feet after school along the path lined with towering pine trees that cast long shadows on Rathay Street.

As he rounded the corner into Berwick Street to join the line of students at his bus stop, the jingle of a shop doorbell rang as another schoolboy burst out onto the footpath and playfully nudged Lloyd with a warm grin.

"What's the matter, mate? You look like you lost a shilling and found a penny," the schoolboy asked.

Lloyd looked around and shrugged as he realised it was his friend Allan.

"Nothing much I can really do about it, but I'll tell ya on the bus."

After they'd settled in their bus seats and were heading down the hill towards Canning Highway, Lloyd stared out the window, jaw clenched.

"That bloody careers advisor," he finally muttered, crumpling a blue form in his fist. "Says I've got 'aptitude for teaching'. Teaching! Like I want to come back to this place."

With enrolments growing as the 'baby boomer' generation continued to enter schools, students choosing to go into education were being encouraged - with training at little to no cost.

Lloyd and Allan both knew that their families couldn't afford the fees for other courses, or even the cost of two more years of schooling for them to sit the Leaving exam.

Lloyd's eyes met Allan's. "Guess we're looking for work at the end of the year, then."

Allan nodded, watching his own reflection in the glass as the familiar streets of Kent Street slipped away, perhaps for good.

WELCOME to your **Kentian Society e-Newsletter**, offering two-way communication with all interested members, families and friends.

We hope you find it both interesting and informative.

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Although Kentians **Lloyd Blake** and **Allan Gilbert** (students, 1957-59) both lived in South Perth, they'd attended different primary schools and didn't meet until they started high school at Kent Street. They later became good friends after Allan's family moved to a street near Lloyd's home and they discovered that their fathers had trained as mechanics, now worked as truck drivers and both had heeded the call of duty during World War II.

After completing their Junior exams, both left school and entered employment. They continued to be friends and had many discussions about what they'd prefer to be doing. Lloyd had grown up on his father's Pacific war stories and his Uncle Bill's tales of survival in German captivity, while Allan's father had been in the Airforce.



Lloyd and Allan, both aged eighteen. **Photo:** Lloyd Blake

When they were eighteen, Lloyd joined the Navy (and became a successful submariner) while Allan joined the Air Force where he became a pilot on Maritime Patrol. Their paths crossed occasionally, meeting in Eastern Australia or home on leave. Later, their service included tours of duty in South East Asia and the Pacific - often, both operating in common theatres at the same time.

Military aircraft and naval ships measure speed and distance in nautical miles (knots). There was often discussion and much laughter between the two young men comparing aircraft speeds of 400 knots with submarines at 10 knots.

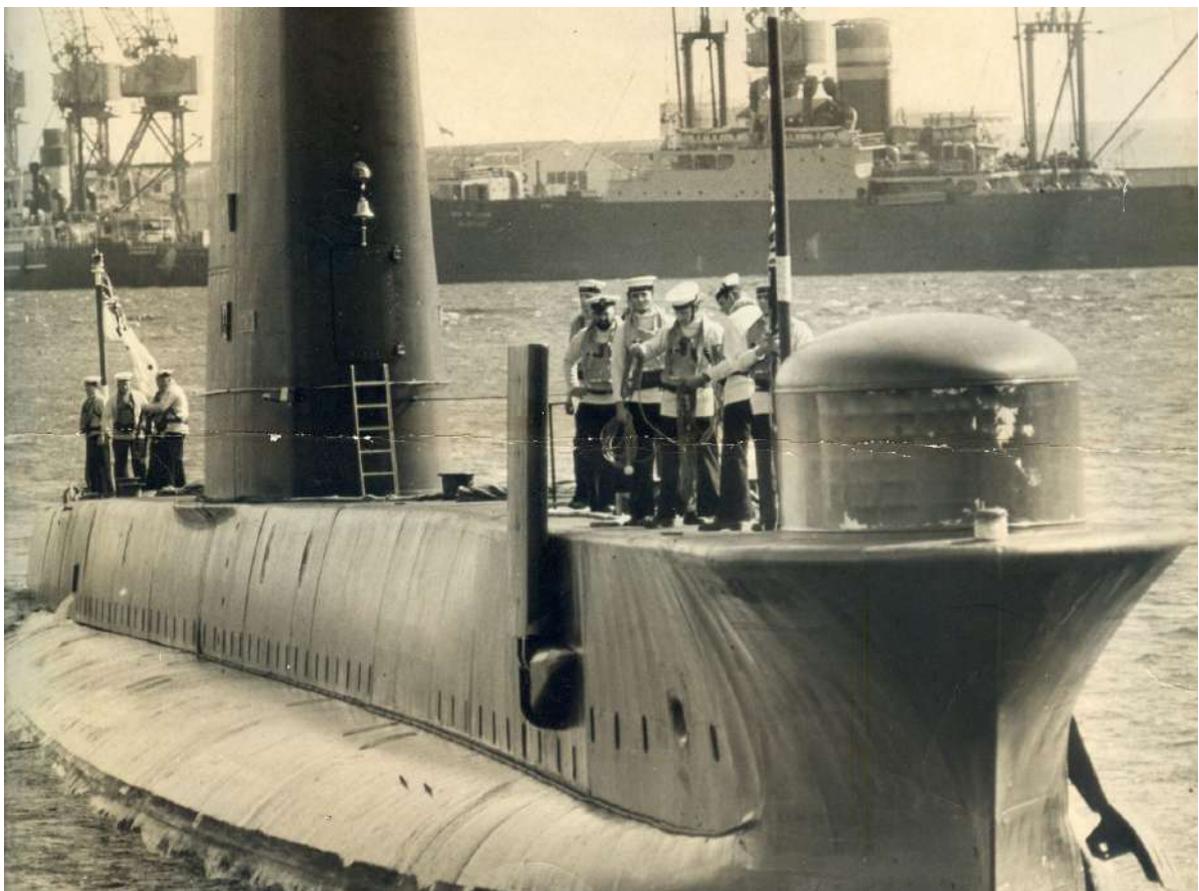
Although primitive by modern standards, communications and navigation were major skill requirements throughout their respective military careers. Navigation in particular demanded advanced mathematics.

Course planning, position fixing and speed calculations were daily challenges overcome with due thanks and recognition to their rigorous Kent Street mathematics teachers.

Military careers are always moving forward, and Allan and Lloyd were both expected to study and work toward promotion. Travel within Australia or to another country for specialist training was quite common.

In 1963, the Australian Submarine Service had been reborn following a decision to order four of the highly successful British “Oberon” class vessels for the RAN. Two further “Oberon” class submarines were completed for the RAN in the later 1970s. The orders were placed with Scotts yard at Greenock in Scotland and each vessel took just under three years to build.

As the Submarine Institute of Australia notes on its website¹, these were some of the most advanced type of conventional submarines in any navy, combining high speed with great underwater endurance. Designed specifically for silent running, they were amongst the quietest operational submarines in the world, including nuclear submarines.



HMAS Otway arriving Fremantle 1968 **Photo:** Lloyd Blake

Soon after the keel of the first of the four was laid down, the RAN began sending volunteers (including Lloyd Blake) for 3 years of training in British Navy Submarines. This flow of personnel was maintained as the building programme progressed, and so as each vessel was commissioned she was manned almost entirely by RAN officers and sailors.

While Lloyd was in Scotland, he received mail from home telling him that Allan Gilbert was also undergoing training at the Royal Airforce base at Lossiemouth in Scotland - a 2 hour train journey from Lloyd's submarine base - and the two chums soon caught up with each other again.



Orion P3 Aircraft

Allan was one of the earliest group of Australians being trained to use the new Orion aircraft. From pursuing Russian submarines during the Cold War, to the search for missing Malaysian Airlines flight MH370, the AP-3C Orion is one of the RAAF's quiet achievers.

A story by pilot Clare Hunter² published by the Australian War Memorial explains that the P3 Orion (manufactured by Lockheed Martin) is an extremely versatile aircraft, capable of land and maritime surveillance, anti-submarine and anti-ship warfare, naval fleet support, and search and rescue operations.

Although reluctant to give away too much detail about the missions sailors like him ran during the Cold War, Lloyd says most people are oblivious to the secret contribution Australian Cold War submariners made beneath the waves.

However, the following extracts from a 2009 story in *The West Australian* newspaper³ give some idea of what was involved.

HMAS Ovens powered slowly through the frigid depths of the Tasman Sea, the crew of the 90m long Oberon-class submarine manning their posts in silence. Their enemy, a Soviet submarine sent to spy on the Australian coastline, lurked somewhere nearby.

It was 1971, the height of the Cold War, and the Ovens was busy playing its part in the cloak-and-dagger battle for intelligence supremacy raging between the US and the Soviet Union.

Gosnells resident Fred Lawrence, who was the petty officer in charge of sonar on the Ovens at the time, said their mission had been to stay undetected and keep track of the enemy sub's movements.

"We caught up with her somewhere down near Tasmania," he said. "It was an old Russian submarine. She'd come down out of the Pacific, right down our east coast and came as far west as Albany before she turned around and went back."

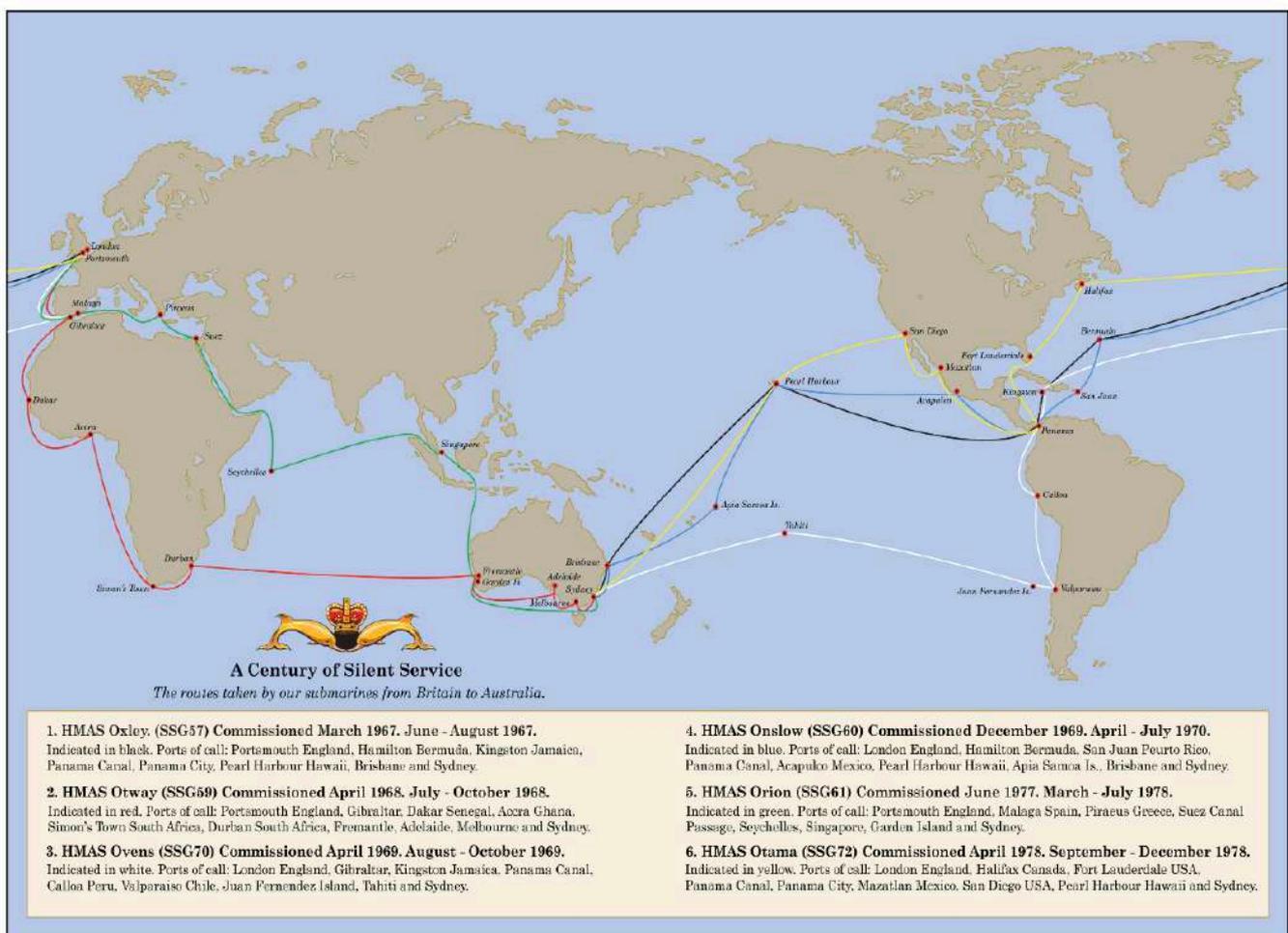
Yesterday, Mr Lawrence and nine other original members of the Ovens' 60-strong crew gathered at the WA Maritime Museum, where the submarine now rests on display, to commemorate 40 years since the vessel was launched.

By 1969, Australian Oberon-class subs, such as the Ovens, were leading the espionage war against the Soviets in the southern hemisphere. Crews would leave port in Australia with no knowledge of their mission and remain submerged for up to six weeks.

Lloyd Blake, who was [also] a petty officer on the Ovens, said that during the 60s, Australian sailors training on British submarines had been involved in secret sea battles with Russian vessels on "mystery tours" in the Atlantic and Arctic oceans.

"Spooks and language specialists" were passengers, Mr Blake said. "We were able to get within 5m of a big (enemy) ship, photograph her and record her sound signature and slip away totally undetected," he said.

In July 1968, Lloyd Blake and the rest of his crew sailed for Australia on only the second submarine built for the RAN for almost forty years - the newly-commissioned HMAS Otway. The trip (via the west coast of Africa) took over 3 months to complete. Each of the other five submarines took a different route (see map below). No GPS! No mobile phones!



Artist: Michael Pinner www.michaelpinner.com

With the arrival of his first child following his marriage in 1971, Lloyd left his successful naval career to resettle in Perth, where he worked as a navigation teacher and a boating columnist for *The Sunday Times*.

Allan continued as a senior officer and was later appointed Base Commander RAAF Base Pearce in WA, where he hosted both his and Lloyd's families while the two long-standing friends celebrated their 40th birthdays.

Sadly, just over a decade later, Allan Gilbert passed away in Canberra aged only 52 after a long illness.

Lloyd went on to become the founding vice president of the Submarine Institute of Australia, and later co-authored with Graham Seal the book *Centenary of Silent Service* for which he received a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for service to the preservation of military history.

As reported in 2018 on SBS News⁴, he's worked hard to get recognition for Australia's maritime heroes, who are often overlooked.

He noted in the SBS story that Australia's only real success at Gallipoli in 1915 came through its submarine HMAS AE2, which managed to provide a block at the Dardanelles that prevented supply access for the Turkish.

With orders to "run amok" inside Turkish territory, the AE2 operated for five days before mechanical faults eventually forced her to the surface, where she was damaged by the torpedo boat Sultanhisar.

She was then scuttled in the Sea of Marmara by the crew, who were all captured.

Mr Blake said as Australia prepared to mark the Anzac centenary a few years ago, he felt it was too focused on the army.

"I thought I should make a noise about this," he said. "They all deserve recognition."

[Editor: This story is based on reminiscences provided by Lloyd Blake, supplemented by publicly available information as referenced in the end-notes. If you have a story you'd like to tell us, send an email to society@kentians.org.au to let us know.]

¹ <https://www.submarineinstitute.com/submarines-in-australia/The-RAN-Oberon-Class.html>

² 'You really fly this...and it's just a joy', Clare Hunter, 28 Feb 2019 (<https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/blog/ap-3c-orion-a9-659>)

³ 'Submariners recall close encounters of Soviet kind', *The West Australian*, (Wed, 12 August 2009)

⁴ 'Medal honour for Australian war historians', *SBS News*, (26 January 2018)

Thoughts Of Chairman Now

Editor: *Members of the Kentian Society met for their customary Annual General Meeting in the school Cricket Pavilion on the morning of Sunday 18 May 2025. This edited extract from the Report by Society Chair John Ayling is provided for all members' information.*

As noted in my report last year, the Kentian Society is transitioning from its 1991 roots as an alumni group to managing a small community museum. This has been built on the collective efforts of a multitude of volunteers since archiving began in 1994.

These volunteers saw value in collecting and conserving student records and the many artefacts donated to the Society for interpretive display about Kent Street Senior High School's history since 1940.

That collection now has several thousand catalogued items, including hundreds of historical school artefacts such as building plans, historical student uniforms, shields, trophies, pennants and plaques, historical classroom equipment and textbooks, student work books and copies of over 400 historical photos.

And why make these efforts? Because in time, these historical archives and artefacts provide valuable data and information for families, academic researchers, and the general public, enhancing understanding of the development of society, culture and education in the south-eastern suburbs of the Perth metropolitan area.

Last year we set out to establish tax-deductible donation channels for alumni and community members, to help fund the Society's museum operations. This has been an extended process, but the ATO finally wrote in early April this year to advise the Society was now considered able to meet the eligibility requirements for Deductible Gift Recipient status as a museum, subject to certain actions being taken (including some additional minor amendments to our constitution).

[Editor: *Every Society member voting at the AGM approved all of the proposed constitutional amendments, and a complete copy of the revised constitution (as registered on 19 June 2025) is now available on our website (www.kentians.org.au).*

A renewed application to the relevant federal agencies to finalise registration of the Society as a charity with DGR status is now underway, and further information about its progress will appear in future newsletters.

In conclusion, John noted recent consultation with members about a proposed Museum Collections Policy to establish the ethical and thematic framework for the collection's strategic development.

He said it was now clear from the nature of members' responses that this draft policy was likely to be approved, with only a few minor changes, for implementation almost immediately.

Later in the meeting, all office-holders and ordinary members of the Management Committee were re-elected unopposed, as were two other members nominated for the remaining two vacant positions (see separate story on page 9 of this newsletter).]

Doesn't Make Cents But Volunteering Is Rewarding

Ever wanted to contribute your skills, life experience, diverse background, and interests to a wider purpose, working in a friendly and stimulating environment?

Our museum is growing, and many of our dedicated senior volunteers are stepping back after years of service, so we need fresh faces. We're seeking curious minds from all walks of life—people eager to learn while making a real difference in our community.

In particular, we'd like to hear from people interested in working in a range of roles associated with the:

- **Museum collection** (people with interest in or experience as curatorial staff responsible for the care, interpretation, and display of collections, as well as the development of exhibitions and educational programs);
- **Library and Research collection** (people with library, archival and history research interests or experience); and
- **Education collection** (people with teaching and practical skills).

We know almost all volunteers for organisations like ours have considerable commitments caring for family members or in other volunteer roles, so contrary to expectations are usually unable to be flexible with their time.

Our community museum aims to tailor work plans to each volunteer's skills and availability, building roles around people rather than forcing people into predefined roles. Although plans must be more flexible, we believe we can still achieve our goals and maintain a happy, fulfilled workforce.

One example of our willingness to challenge accepted ways of working is an outreach volunteering scheme that's currently being considered.

If for instance a valuable volunteer were to find travel too challenging to get to the museum, our team could assemble work packages to be completed at home and take them to the volunteer, collecting and exchanging work packages say every 2 weeks.

The work might mainly be digitising images or transcribing handwritten documents; something easily achieved away from the museum, if people are willing to carefully select items and take a practical approach to collections care.

It's a simple idea, and it would take some planning and organising, but ultimately it could benefit both the museum and the individual.

Moreover, the volunteer maintains regular contact with friends at the museum, gets to hear any news and gossip, and also contributes to the community through their work.

Why not email us (society@kentians.org.au) if you're interested in any of the roles outlined above or want to know more?

Profiles of New Management Committee Members

[Note: *Although re-elected to the Management Committee at this year's AGM, Helen Barns resigned from her position due to personal reasons in early June this year. A motion, in accordance with rule 40 of the Constitution, to formally appoint Dr Stephen Cohen as an ordinary committee member to fill the casual vacancy was approved by the Management Committee on 3 July 2025.]*

Margaret (Fenn) Thomas JP (Student 1966-71)

Margaret attended East Victoria Park Primary School in the early 1960s before being enrolled as a student at Kent Street SHS, where she completed her Leaving Certificate.

She holds a Bachelor of Commerce, is a Justice of the Peace and Certified Practising Accountant, and has been Mayor of the City of Kalamunda since 2019.

She's also a long-serving Board member of the Kentian Scholarship Foundation (Inc).

Trevor Rowe AO (Student 1957-59)

Trevor attended Manning Primary School in the early 1950s before becoming a student for three years at Kent Street SHS. He left school at the age of sixteen to work in an office as a trainee accountant.

He's currently a senior advisor to Rothschild & Co Australia, having previously been executive chairman of the company for a period of seventeen years. He was Director of the Australian Securities Exchange (ASX) for almost 10 years, and a long-standing member of both the Australia-China High-Level Dialogue Forum and the Australian Foreign Affairs Council.

He was an original member of the Board of Guardians of the Future Fund (the independently managed sovereign wealth fund of the Australian Government) from 2006 until 2012. He also served as Chancellor of Bond University from 2003 to 2009, and in June 2011, he was named an Officer of the Order of Australia for distinguished service to the finance sector, to higher education, and to the community.

A more detailed profile about Trevor was published in our May 2024 e-Newsletter.

Dr Stephen Cohen (Student 1971-75)

Steve grew up in the 1960s and '70s in Victoria Park and later Kensington, and attended Victoria Park PS and then Kent Street SHS for five years.

After completing school, he studied medicine at the University of WA. He's a Fellow of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, holds a Diploma of Obstetrics and a Diploma of Anaesthetics, and has a Masters of Psychological Medicine from the University of New South Wales.

Steve joined the Duchess Medical Practice in Busselton (where he still works as a General Practitioner) soon after it was established in the early 1990s.

Your Say

Readers appreciate the news brought to us by members, and often are important for inclusion in Archives records and displays, allowing us to honour the history and share the heritage of Kent Street Senior High School. Your contributions should be sent directly to society@kentians.org.au

Subject: Woodworking at Kent Street
From: Chris Tedbury, student 1968-70

I was speaking to an old Kent Street school friend (Lindsay Best), we were there 68/70 and we discussed our woodworking experiences. I told him that I made a coat hanger, which my dad thought was hilarious!!! It didn't have a hook, it was just a 3 sided "thing".

Lindsay told me his teacher Mr Saat was a hard task master, and if not happy with your work would yell "Heads down!!" and throw the object over the students' heads into the wood bin.

Lindsay also told me he made a book case and said to Mr Saat, "Sir, I have a problem. I've made 2 left-hand sides." Lindsay was expecting the worst.

Mr Saat just sighed and looked upwards to the heavens!!!



Bookcase made at school **Photo:** Chris Tedbury

I said to Lindsay I made a bookcase as well and it took a year. When finished, I could see it wasn't straight. My teacher Mr La Fontaine clicked his heels and pushed the backing board out and fixed it.

Who else made a book case? And did you notice that the chisels, saws and planes were blunt? Maybe Kent Street students couldn't be trusted with sharp, dangerous tools.

[Editor: We're very grateful to Chris for his post and photo on our Kent Street SHS Alumni Facebook page last year. It's still generating comments from readers (see below), so we thought we'd share some of them here for those of you who don't use Facebook.]

Tamara: I still have the bookcase my Dad made in woodwork at Kent St, just a couple of years earlier than that.

Lawrence: Made a bookcase also and I still have it in very good condition. Woodwork was with Mr Saat and Metalwork with Mr Sharples.



Ken: Ahh!! The Kent Street coat hanger, my first project in 1960, still in use today.

Mal: Hope the old school uniform and tie are still hanging from it, Ken!

Carsten: I made a coffee table, I gave it to mum back in 96. Got it back after she passed away 4 years ago.

Kim: Norbert La Fontaine was a great teacher. Came in Saturdays so we could work on our projects.

Mine was a two-glass sliding doors cabinet with a two-door cupboard at the end. Stained walnut inside and teak outside to match our furniture at home.

As for blunt chisels, it was each student's job to sharpen them on the big stone wheel and the leather bench straps. Loved it.

When I went for the 70th Anniversary school reunion it was great to go into the old centre and touch "my" bench once more.

Gordon: I made a coffee table and the legs on one end were 1/2 inch off-centre. Used in our homes for many years and the only one who noticed it was the teacher.

Paul: I could only afford the wood to make a small bedside table as my Junior Woodwork model. It had the best French polished finish of my wood work class.

[Editor: Generating memories like these is part of what makes our museum so valuable and worth supporting through your donations of time, money, or memorabilia.

Why not email us (society@kentians.org.au) if you're interested in helping out?]

Pat Sanders Heads East

Pat Sanders (nee McArdell), student 1957-61, a long-serving archives volunteer and honorary life member of the Kentian Society, was specially acknowledged at this year's AGM as she is moving to the Eastern States to be nearer to her family.

In 2010, Pat became assistant to senior archivist Judith Lee. They were very busy preparing for Kent Street SHS's 70th Anniversary celebrations and later also helped move the archives to a new area in the Science wing, while setting up an adjacent office.

Following the move to the Science block and Judith's retirement, Pat became the senior archivist. Her volunteer team began organising interactive displays of the Society's historical artefacts for Year 7 orientation day. In 2018, they also retrieved archived student enrolment forms for the Royal Commission into Child Sexual Abuse, sparing school staff this burden.

Pat oversaw all of this work until she eased back in 2021 (when Vicki Duball became senior archivist), although Pat continued volunteering in the archives until this year.

Society Membership

*New Society Members and renewals since **February 2024**:*

Bev Adam (Smith), student 1953-56
Beverley Booth, teacher-librarian 1992-2018
Lloyd Blake, student 1957-60
Geoff Cooper, student 1985-89
Steve Dobson, student 1994-98
Stephen Cohen, student 1971-75
Alun Dufty, student 1954-59
Marg Fox (Jarvis), student 1956-57
Warren Grellier, teacher 1973-76
Jim Langford, student 1957-61
Hailey McArthur, student 2021-23
Jude Quinn, student 2020-23

Have **YOU** completed your **MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION / UPDATE?**
Forms are available on our website www.kentians.org.au

Your membership contributions help us to keep you connected, build new connections, promote reunions, and preserve your memories in our museum.

Don't risk YOUR membership falling into arrears. We are always reviewing our membership records, so if you want to remain a financial Society Member please make sure to update your details (including your email address) on our new Update Form. Also, remember to pay your membership fee into the bank account specified on the form.

Don't delay - do it today.