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# The Lady Principal, Miss Annie Hughston (1859–1943)

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## Introduction

In 1881 the University of Melbourne opened its doors to women for the first time, but taking up this opportunity was not a simple matter in a community that in general did not value the higher education of women. Another problem was that many women were not eligible for entry due to the gap between the eight years of free education provided in ‘common’ (state) schools and university entrance level. This deficit could only be bridged by paying for tuition. A few common schools offered tuition in some subjects as an ‘extra’, but most university entrants were pupils from independent ‘high’ (i.e. secondary) schools. The options for girls in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne who wanted to qualify for university entrance altered little until the mid-1950s;<sup>1</sup> either they travelled to the inner city or entered one of a multitude of independent schools.

The independent school sector was made up of schools owned by individuals, churches and companies. We reserve the term ‘private school’ to refer to schools owned by individuals. In the early 1920s Fintona Presbyterian Girls’ Grammar School was, according to the *Argus*, the largest girls’ secondary school in Victoria.<sup>2</sup> This claim is incorrect, but if the writer meant the largest girls’ private school they may well have been right. In 1921 Fintona had approximately 450 pupils. At about that time other large private schools in the same area included Ruyton with 170 pupils<sup>3</sup> and Lauriston with about 300.<sup>4</sup> Fintona rivalled its largest church-owned neighbour, Methodist Ladies College (MLC), which had 514,<sup>5</sup> and the pre-eminent (academically) school for girls, Presbyterian Ladies College (PLC), which had over 500 pupils.<sup>6</sup> Miss Annie Hughston was the owner, principal and

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1 Janet McCalman, *Journeyings: The Biography of a Middle-Class Generation 1920–1990* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1993), 114.

2 ‘Old Fintonians Celebrate Reunion’, *Argus*, 1 May 1924, 9.

3 Marjorie Theobald, *Ruyton Remembers 1878–1978* (Melbourne: The Hawthorn Press, 1978), 109.

4 Carolyn Rasmussen, *Lauriston: 100 Years of Educating Girls 1901–2000* (Sydney: The Helicon Press, 1999), 63.

5 A. Harold Wood ed., *Seventy-Five Years at Methodist Ladies’ College Hawthorn 1882–1957* (Melbourne: Spectator Publishing Company, 1957), 79.

6 Estimated from new enrolments and assuming a residence time of 2.5 years. PLC Melbourne Archive, Enrolment Book 1921–32, 185.

headmistress of Fintona and had, with her brother William, founded the school in 1896. Based on this growth there are grounds for regarding Miss Hughston as the most remarkable of a number of remarkable women who owned and operated girls' schools. The *Australian Dictionary of Biography* has no entry for the vast majority of these women, thus bearing out the contention of Marjorie Theobald, a historian of women's education, that 'women have been bundled unceremoniously into the lumber room of history'.<sup>7</sup>

Where women are remembered, it is usually in the partisan commissioned histories of the schools they once owned, but there is little about Miss Hughston in the only history of Fintona, published in 1946.<sup>8</sup> To some extent, she was complicit in her own eclipse. She was averse to activities that brought her into public focus. As one student commented after a presentation by the students in her honour at the 1920 speech night:

We would have liked Miss Hughston to reply herself—but she never will speak in public and asked the Rev TJ Smith to reply for her. He made us laugh at the funny way he pretended to be Miss Hughston herself talking to us—but every now and again he forgot and became Mr Smith again.<sup>9</sup>

She wrote no memoir and kept no records. In this paper we set out to make Miss Hughston known. In reconstructing her life, we have made substantial use of public records, limited family and school records, and anecdotes. We start with her family background and her training, proceed to her work at her school and end with other aspects of her life.

## Family background

Annie Hughston's parents were both Presbyterians born in Northern Ireland, Johnston (also spelled Johnstone) Hughston in 1820 and Catherine Wilson in 1835.<sup>10</sup> The Wilson family settled in Victoria in 1841. Following the death of his first wife, Johnston arrived in New South Wales in 1855 from Canada where his family had migrated in 1833. At a time when formal qualifications were not required, he subsequently worked as an engineer-surveyor in Heathcote, Victoria, and in 1857 changed to a teaching position at the Heathcote school. He and Catherine married in 1858.

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7 Theobald, *Ruyton Remembers*, 37.

8 Beatrice Chilvers ed., *The History of Fintona 1896–1946* (Melbourne: McCarron, Bird, 1946).

9 'Speech Day, 1921', *The Fintonian*, August 1922, 2.

10 Public Records Office Victoria (PROV), VPRS 13719/P1, Records of service for Johnston (1060) and Catherine Hughston (1058).



Figure 1: Miss Hughston's father Johnston and mother Catherine (with grandchild), dates unknown. Schools liked to employ husband and wife teaching teams. Johnston and Catherine were one such team.

Source: Personal collection Dennis and Heale.

The couple settled in Heathcote where Catherine joined her husband as a teacher in 1859 only weeks before the birth of Annie on 23 May 1859.<sup>11</sup> This was the beginning of a teaching partnership that stretched to their retirement. During these years, Catherine gave birth to another seven children, four of whom survived: Jane (1861), Robert (1864), William (1867) and Violet (1871). At the end of 1863, when Annie was four, the Hughstons moved to Berwick, close to the Wilson family farm. Several members of Catherine's family were on the Board of Patrons (Management) at the Common School established in Berwick in the late 1850s and may have been instrumental in securing for Johnston the position of head teacher.<sup>12</sup> In mid-1867, Johnston was appointed head teacher with Catherine as his assistant at the Wesleyan School in the growing mining town of Daylesford. There they raised their family and educated their children.

These were turbulent years in Victorian education.<sup>13</sup> Less than half the school-aged population was enrolled in a school. Competition between state and denominational schools, some of which received state aid, was a part of the problem. Another difficulty was that church rivalries and competition for congregations resulted in regions with either an oversupply of church schools or none at all. Poverty and

11 Department of Justice, Victoria, Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, Births in the District of Heathcote in the Colony of Victoria.

12 L. J. Blake ed., *Vision and Realisation: A Centenary History of State Education in Victoria* (Melbourne: Education Department of Victoria, 1973), 3:1177.

13 Edward Sweetman, Charles R. Long, and John Smyth, *A History of State Education in Victoria* (Melbourne: The Education Department of Victoria, 1922), 17.

migratory populations, particularly in the goldfields, also contributed to low attendances. Then in 1872, following a royal commission, the *Education Act 1872* (Vic.) introduced reforms that made education 'free, compulsory and secular', and abolished state aid to denominational schools. In the reorganisation of schools that followed the 1872 Act, the Wesleyan School became Common School 903, which in 1875 was amalgamated with three others. Johnston was passed over as head teacher of the new school, a decision that must have bitterly disappointed him, given his support for reform.<sup>14</sup> Yet, it should not have been a complete surprise. Letters from the Education Department to School 903 had informed him of several transgressions: he had employed under age staff, the 'programme of instruction was not observed', 'excessive holidays [were] given' and he had not promptly notified them when he discovered that the numbers of pupils had been misreported as 275 instead of 175.<sup>15</sup> He was instead appointed as 'Special Assistant'—a position he held until his retirement in 1883. Catherine's position dropped from first to fourth assistant.<sup>16</sup>

Soon after Johnston and Catherine's appointment to School 903, the school had expanded enough to need additional staff. By 1873 there was a second assistant and three pupil teachers, including the young Annie Hughston, aged 13 years and eight months. Pupil teachers were teaching apprentices who, under supervision, taught lower classes all day and studied and took instruction themselves outside school hours. Their lives were bound by their school and, often, by family responsibilities,<sup>17</sup> and the quality of their learning was dependent on their supervising teacher.

It could be argued that Annie's parents were not ideal models of pedagogy. Johnston had an 1849 letter of reference from Canada conveying 'much reason to express our satisfaction at this method of his teaching and the progress of his scholars',<sup>18</sup> but in Australia praise was muted. He was acknowledged as well-meaning and 'seemingly anxious to do his best', and Catherine was, at times, commended for working 'honestly and well'. However, the inspectors' reports generally did not flatter either of them. Johnston's teaching style was described as 'poor—quite behind the age' and 'very weak'. One observer noted: 'I doubt he could give a lesson on anything'.<sup>19</sup> Another suggested that he 'should be pensioned off at the first opportunity'.<sup>19</sup> Catherine was described as being 'entirely destitute of energy or animation, [and] of but little use in the school'.<sup>20</sup> Inspectorial comments were notoriously harsh in these years as the Education Department tried to professionalise itself. Neither Johnston

14 Elizabeth Roberts and Mary Lush, 'William Hughston 1867–1930: His Life and Legacy', *Victorian Historical Journal* 86, no. 2 (2015): 299–320.

15 PROV, VPRS 796/P00019, Outwards Letter Books, Primary Schools.

16 Records of service for Johnston and Catherine Hughston.

17 Constance Tisdall, *Forerunners: The Saga of a Family of Teachers* (Melbourne: FW Cheshire Pty Ltd, 1961), 59.

18 Letter held by Catherine Dennis, Johnston's great-granddaughter.

19 Record of service for Johnston Hughston.

20 Record of service for Catherine Hughston.

nor Catherine could ever be accused of being uninterested in education. After their retirement—Johnston in 1883 and Catherine in 1886—both remained interested in the teaching lives of their children. Annie, Jane, William and Violet all taught and Robert's wife Grace, and Violet's husband Walter Murdoch, were also teachers. Walter Murdoch, later the respected essayist after whom Murdoch University was named, was clearly impressed by the Hughstons, explaining that he took up a foundation chair at the University of Western Australia in 1913 because 'I had a desire to show [Violet] and her brothers and sisters that I had the goods. I suspected myself of being a nobody and I wanted a chair as evidence that I was a somebody'.<sup>21</sup>

The Hughstons probably had an adequate income during their working lives and retirement, but not much of a capital reserve after the 1890s crash. The family account suggests that Catherine worked because husband and wife teams were the norm rather than out of financial necessity. Johnston was reputed to have a small private income.<sup>22</sup> It is evident from the family history that there were major stresses in Catherine and Johnston's marriage. One example was Johnston's sale of the farm that Catherine had inherited on her father's death. This was done without her permission. The family postulated that this event triggered her uncle James Buchanan's support in parliament for the Victorian *Married Women's Property Act 1884*. Significantly, in 1891 all the women of the family, excepting Violet who was still at school but including Robert's wife, signed the Women's Suffrage Petition.<sup>23</sup> After retiring, Johnston and Catherine moved to Melbourne, where in 1889, they briefly owned a large property in Hawthorn.<sup>24</sup> Johnston returned to work in mid-1889, as the Depression took hold, retiring again at the end of 1890. He died in 1910 and Catherine in 1912, both of 'senile decay'.<sup>25</sup> Neither left wills filed for probate, suggesting that they died without substantial financial assets.<sup>26</sup> This interpretation is consistent with what we know about Miss Hughston's access to capital. Her first two land purchases in 1907 and 1910 were made with the help of mortgages, the first to Catherine's family and the second to William Ower, the father of one of her teachers.<sup>27</sup>

21 Walter Murdoch as cited in John La Nauze, *Walter Murdoch: A Biographical Memoir* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1977), 57.

22 Anne Heale, 'The Family Reminiscences of Anne Heale, 1903–1992', Unpublished memoir, Fintona Archive, Melbourne, 1991.

23 Parliament of Victoria, Women's Suffrage Petition 1891, accessed 20 August 2015, [www.parliament.vic.gov.au/about/the-history-of-parliament/womens-suffrage-petition](http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/about/the-history-of-parliament/womens-suffrage-petition).

24 PROV, VPRS 2339, City of Hawthorn Rate Book, 1889. The Hughstons are reputed to have owned other properties, but we have found no further evidence of ownership in either Camberwell or Hawthorn.

25 Department of Justice Victoria, Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages Victoria, death certificates for Johnston and Catherine Hughston.

26 PROV, VPRS 28, Probate and Administration Files, Description of this series.

27 Department of Sustainability and Environment Victoria, Certificates of Title, vol. 02105 folio 818 (1907, mortgage discharged 1917), vol. 02347, folio 391 (1910, mortgage discharged 1919).





Figure 2: Annie Hughston as a girl. Annie started work in Daylesford, Victoria, as a pupil teacher supervised by her parents. She was 13 years old.

Source: Personal collection Dennis and Heale.

## Teacher training

The young Annie's resignation as a pupil teacher in March 1874 may well have been prompted by the amalgamating of School 903, and it appears she then started on her high school education. In 1878 she briefly attended PLC in Melbourne,<sup>28</sup> but she matriculated from Daylesford Grammar in 1879, passing in Latin, French, arithmetic, algebra, Euclid and geography, but failing English.<sup>29</sup> In 1880 she set about qualifying as a teacher by becoming an unpaid assistant. The first year of teacher training involved a year working in a school after which an examination gave the student a qualification equivalent to a certificate of competency.<sup>30</sup> The second year was spent at the Teacher Training College. Annie 'failed for admission' to this second year,<sup>31</sup> perhaps a victim of the policy giving preference to men.<sup>32</sup> However, she was 'allowed [a] further trial' and Inspector Cox, who had damned her father, noted that she was 'intelligent and hardworking' and 'taught very well'. She seems to have been licensed to teach in 1881 and was appointed a temporary assistant at Common School 262 in Gisborne on 6 February 1882. She lasted nine days! She next appears in 1884 in the prospectus of PLC as a senior mathematics teacher. From her claim to have 13 years teaching experience at PLC, we can deduce that she started there in 1882.

Miss Hughston, as perhaps we should now call her, always cited her years at PLC as her teaching qualification. During those years she worked with J. P. Wilson (no relation to Catherine), the well-respected senior mathematics teacher and Shakespearean scholar.<sup>33</sup> He was awarded a doctor of laws while teaching at PLC. In 1889, PLC girls were the only ones to have gained first class honours in matriculation maths. They achieved that distinction 15 times between 1884 and 1889. Fitzpatrick considers Henry Handel Richardson's mathematics teacher in *The Getting of Wisdom* to be a libellous portrait of Dr Wilson. The name of the teacher, Dr Pughson, was thought by her to be a comment on the pug nose of Dr Wilson;<sup>34</sup> it may in addition be an oblique reference to Miss Hughston.

28 PLC Melbourne Archive, Enrolment Book 1878, entry 294.

29 University of Melbourne Archive, Matriculation records 1879.

30 Sweetman et al., *A History of State Education in Victoria*, 95.

31 Education Department of Victoria Records, Record of service for Annie Hughston, no. 5566.

32 Marjorie Theobald, *Knowing Women: Origins of Women's Education in the Nineteenth-Century Australia* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 155.

33 Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *PLC Melbourne: The First Century 1875–1975* (Melbourne: The Presbyterian Ladies College, 1975), 79–98.

34 Fitzpatrick, *PLC Melbourne*, 91.





Figure 3: Miss Hughston in Canada, 1889. She took leave from PLC to travel with her father and cousin to Europe and to meet his siblings in Canada.

Source: Personal collection Dennis and Heale.



In January 1894 William Hughston, assisted by Violet, opened Camperdown High School in the western district of Victoria. The school was actively promoted at district events and advertised as catering for girls and boys, day pupils and female boarders, from kindergarten to matriculation.<sup>35</sup> Within a few months they had too many pupils to manage and, with the promise of many pupils taking ‘extras’ and a profit of £500 in their first year, William urged Annie to join them.<sup>36</sup> As an advertisement in the *Camperdown Chronical* shows, she did just that.<sup>37</sup>

Perhaps from the very start, Miss Hughston saw this move as a step towards something more ambitious. As a woman, she was never going to be principal or headmistress of PLC.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, it was a risky choice. The people who opened schools in these times were many and various. Some women ran primary schools from their family homes, with perhaps a dozen children including their own. These and other variants of ‘Dame schools’ ranged from awful to excellent in the quality of the education they offered, but had in common the fact that they did not require much capital or involve much risk. Those who owned larger schools, such as Eliza Bromby of Ruyton and Isabella (Isabel) Henderson of Clyde, often had the backing of well-connected, scholarly families, or long-term partnerships with teaching colleagues.<sup>39</sup> As impressive as they may have been, the Hughstons did not have the sort of social and intellectual connections or the money of many of the private owners of successful schools in Melbourne. They did, however, have plenty of courage. Camperdown was a success while operated by the Hughstons, but they sold it at the end of 1895 and returned to Melbourne to open Fintona. Again, this was a gamble. Schools had closed through the Depression, even in the growing eastern suburbs, and Miss Annie Hughston and her brother William were not well known. For a young woman who first left school before she was 14 years old, it was an audacious step. All of the costs of a private school had to be covered by tuition fees because there was no state aid to non-government schools. The owners’ financial liability was not limited and, in contrast to many church schools, there was no governing body to absorb the costs associated with the premises and equipment.

35 Roberts and Lush, ‘William Hughston 1867–1930’.

36 Fintona Archive, E1/4, Letter from William Hughston to Annie Hughston, undated.

37 Classified Advertising, *Camperdown Chronicle*, 28 July 1894, 1.

38 PLC principals were male until 1938, Fitzpatrick, *PLC Melbourne*, 175.

39 Theobald, *Ruyton Remembers*, 40; Melanie Guile, *Clyde School 1919–1975: An Uncommon History* (Melbourne: Clyde Old Girls Association Inc., 2006), 16.



Figure 4: Miss Hughston's brother William, date unknown and her sister Violet, 1896. Miss Hughston left her teaching position at PLC to join her brother and sister in running a school they had opened in western Victoria. After a couple of years the Hughstons closed this school and opened a new one in Melbourne with Miss Hughston and William as principals and Violet as a teacher.

Source: Personal collection Dennis and Heale (William); National Library of Australia, 2987/3/670 (Violet).

## Establishing a school in Melbourne

The *Argus* of 22 January 1896 carried an advertisement announcing a new school for girls; Violet also taught at this school, which was run from a rented mansion called 'Essington' in Mayston Street, Hawthorn. The Hughstons' first intake included boarders from their Camperdown school and the Goulburn Valley<sup>40</sup> where their brother Robert had recently been a medical practitioner. With day students there was a total of 14 pupils on the first day. The pupils' fees had to support three Hughstons and one employed staff member.<sup>41</sup> The three siblings, and perhaps their parents, plus the boarders and a resident mistress, all lived at Essington. They offered all levels of education from kindergarten to matriculation. During 1897 William left Fintona, returning for 1901–03.<sup>42</sup> At the end of 1897 Violet married Walter Murdoch at Essington<sup>43</sup> and continued in 1898 as a teacher of extras.

40 Fintona Archive, Document 6, Marion Wiseman, *Reminiscences of Fintona 1897–1901*, 1943.

41 Chilvers, *The History of Fintona*, 1.

42 Roberts and Lush, 'William Hughston 1867–1930'.

43 'Family Notices', *Australasian*, 15 January 1898, 55.

With the benefit of hindsight we can identify factors that contributed to the fate of independent schools, but determining what was the consequence of wise planning and what should be attributed to chance is difficult. Why did the Hughstons open a girls' school and not another coeducational school? We do not know. In the year before Fintona was founded, 1895, most (62 per cent) of the 1,200 pupils entered for matriculation examinations in Victoria were boys.<sup>44</sup> There were private, coeducational schools in Melbourne, but in the years to come single sex schools would be the most successful.

It was wise or fortunate planning that they located the school on the boundary of Hawthorn and Camberwell. The Hughstons would have known of, or foreseen, several factors that would contribute to their school's success here. The population of Hawthorn could afford school fees and valued education. In 1891 Hawthorn and St Kilda had more private schools per resident than any other parts of Melbourne.<sup>45</sup> The Hughstons were Presbyterians. Non-Anglican protestants (mainly Presbyterians and Methodists) made up an unusually large part of the community of Camberwell, 47 per cent compared to 34 per cent in the metropolitan area as a whole.<sup>46</sup> The population of the eastern suburbs was expanding as large estates were subdivided (Table 1). The increase in Camberwell was such that, assuming a proportional increase in pupil numbers, a school with 50 pupils in 1891 should have grown to 100 by 1911 and to nearly 200 by 1921.

Table 1: Population of some eastern suburbs of Melbourne, 1891–1933.

Source	Hawthorn	Kew	Camberwell
1891 census	19,585	8,462	6,204
1901 census	21,339	9,469	8,640
1911 census	24,407	11,148	12,462
1921 census	29,178	17,382	23,844
1933 census	33,758	25,486	50,052
increase 1891–1933	14,173	17,024	43,848

The area was connected to old and new suburbs by a train line between the city and Lilydale, so the catchment for the school was not entirely limited to walking or carriage distance. In the future there would be more stations and a tram line. A water supply for those near Burke Road was guaranteed by a water main; drains, sewers and electricity would arrive in the early 1900s.<sup>47</sup> Lastly, in the matter of location, there were a number of boom-era houses that were large enough for a small school.

<sup>44</sup> Matriculation records, 1895.

<sup>45</sup> Victoria Peel, Deborah Zion and Jane Yule, *A History of Hawthorn* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1993), 74.

<sup>46</sup> Geoffrey Blainey, *A History of Camberwell* (Melbourne: Lothian, 1980), 77–78.

<sup>47</sup> Blainey, *A History of Camberwell*, 47, 50, 70–71, 82–83.

Location and single sex education were not enough to guarantee success in a very competitive environment. Several local girls' schools already had records of achievement in matriculation examinations, including MLC, Ruyton, Grace Park and Newnham.<sup>48</sup> The proximity of Camberwell station might bring pupils to the school, but it could also take them away to the established schools in Auburn, Glenferrie and Hawthorn, or to one of the plethora of schools in the inner city. It was a bold and self-confident move to establish yet another school.

Schools were often named after a place of family significance. Fintona was a Roman Catholic parish (and town) in Northern Ireland<sup>49</sup> and Catherine's place of origin. In those days of deep division between Protestants and Roman Catholics it is surprising that the Presbyterian Hughstons risked being mistaken for Roman Catholics. In 1898 Miss Hughston wrote to William about an applicant for a teaching position: 'I have also to write to a Roman Catholic that I was rather taken with, and say that she won't do. The boarders' parents might object'.<sup>50</sup>

It was the principal's task to convert potential pupils to enrolled ones. Miss Hughston's rural background and modest formal education may have appealed to upwardly mobile families who also had not had much education.<sup>51</sup> As a senior mathematics teacher at a time when some thought mathematics bad for the female brain, it could be assumed that she took scholarship seriously. Competent management was promised by the fact that Miss Hughston had a 'clear grip on matters financial ... she could talk finance like a man'.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, she was not a blue stocking. She is remembered in her youth for her 'pretty dresses'.<sup>53</sup> She had non-academic pursuits; she played tennis,<sup>54</sup> exchanged knitting patterns with her mother,<sup>55</sup> liked dogs and could manage a cow and kitchen garden ('depressingly prolific in pumpkins and marrows') for the house.<sup>56</sup> As was common at the time, family was clearly the social focus of Miss Hughston's life, but there is evidence of treasured friendship outside family and Fintona. Her will included a bequest to a Miss Winter, who is described as 'my friend'.<sup>57</sup> This was a long friendship, probably dating from Miss Hughston's time in Camperdown. Miss Winter held several teaching positions including one at Fintona for about a year. She then became bursar of St Catherine's School, Toorak.<sup>58</sup>

48 Matriculation records, 1895. Grace Park and Newnham no longer exist.

49 Padraic O. Gallachair, *Old Fintona: A History of the Catholic Parish of Donaghcavey in County Tyrone* (Monaghan: Cumann Seanchais Chlochair, 1974), 51.

50 Fintona Archive, Annie Hughston to William Hughston, 6 February 1898.

51 McCalman, *Journeys*, 69–70.

52 Fintona Archive, Document 1, Louisa Powell, Annie Hughston: An Appreciation, c. 1943.

53 Fintona Archive, Document 6, Marion Wiseman, Reminiscences of Fintona 1897–1901, 1943.

54 Fintona Archive, E1/2, William Hughston.

55 Fintona Archive, E1/3, Annie Hughston to Catherine and Johnston Hughston, undated.

56 Fintona Archive, Document 5, Isabella Curnick, Fintona 1905–1911, c. 1943.

57 PROV, VPRS series 7591/P2, unit 1207, Will of Annie Hughston.

58 St Catherine's School Toorak Archive, letter from John Winter to The Registrar, Teacher and School Board.



Physically, Miss Hughston was tall, at least as perceived by children, thin and stately with fine facial features. As she aged, her white hair was accentuated by her dressing mostly in black with a high collar. There are varying accounts of her personality. Her niece Anne Heale's reminiscences refer to Johnston's dominance being passed on to Miss Hughston. One of the students of the early 1900s said of Miss Hughston 'she was a dominating personality and yet such was her gift, she did not dominate us. There was real freedom of thought'.<sup>59</sup> There is the usual problem here that what might be called decisiveness in a man might be called dominance in a woman. Her great nieces, who only knew her as an old woman, found her strict and formidable on some occasions and welcoming on others.<sup>60</sup> According to a staff member, Miss Hughston had 'exacting, perhaps even severe, standards of work and efficiency'.<sup>61</sup> By contrast, other people describe her as motherly.<sup>62</sup> Violet said that Miss Hughston was 'a [mother] by instinct' because of her attention to individuals, but doubted that her pupils would have known of it. She stated:

We saw her at least three or four times a week and we both remember how constantly she talked to us about some problem that was troubling her—some girl that was unhappy, some other girl that was not doing well in her class, and so on.<sup>63</sup>

Surviving reminiscences from early pupils give a warm account of their relationship with Miss Hughston. In a tribute after Miss Hughston's death, one pupil wrote, 'I think that each of us has been aware of her charm her open mindedness and that childlike quality in her that will never grow old'.<sup>64</sup> Miss Hughston shared the boarding house with pupils for about 25 years. One wrote:

Often on Saturday evenings she would suggest our having charades and she would supply odds and ends of properties in the way of old fashioned frocks and such to help us create the atmosphere we needed. As I look back, I can see her shaking with helpless laughter at our efforts, and there was no feeling of patronage about it ... On other Saturday evenings she would suggest our playing games that had a certain educational value, ... Although the games were ostensibly of an intellectual nature they invariably ended in a good deal of hilarity and fun.<sup>65</sup>

Miss Hughston maintained the tradition of entertaining the boarders until the end of her ownership. Although the occasions were not frequent and took on a more formal note, the boarders continued to feel prized, rather than condescended to, in her presence.<sup>66</sup> The pupils of Miss Hughston's later years in the 1920s and 1930s mostly remember her as someone they saw passing by—strict, revered but not known.

59 Fintona Archive, Document 5, Isabella Curnick.

60 Interviews with Philippa Heale (Fintona Archive, Oral History Group Interview number 22, 2009) and with Catherine Dennis and Philippa Heale, 7 August 2014.

61 Fintona Archive, Document 2, Jeannie Ower, c. 1943.

62 Interview with Daisy Chancellor, 1978.

63 Fintona Archive, Document 3, Violet Murdoch to Mr Macaulay, 8 May 1943.

64 Phyllis Reichl, *Fintona: The Story in Pictures 1896–1986* (Melbourne: Fintona Girls' School, 1986), 40.

65 Fintona Archive, Document 1, Louisa Powell.

66 Oral History Group Interview 14, Dora Scales, 2009.

We used the words ‘bold’ and ‘courageous’ to describe Miss Hughston’s actions, yet, as her refusal to speak on speech nights suggests, she either lacked confidence or did not see public performance as part of her role. The suggestion that in educational circles women were ‘handicapped by their knowledge that their own education was very imperfect’<sup>67</sup> certainly applied to Miss Hughston. Women with university degrees were no longer rare in the ranks of teachers, indeed Miss Syme, whom she appointed in 1897, had a degree and a higher teaching qualification than Miss Hughston. Violet’s post-mortem description of Miss Hughston suggests another reason for her reluctance to make public statements:

She had a queer and erratic sense of humour, only to be detected by those who knew her well. It was perhaps her sense of humour that made her reticent about her ideals. She had a horror of high flown professions of any sort.<sup>68</sup>

The hard work and anxiety associated with the constant drive to attract students in the early years are evident in a letter Miss Hughston wrote to William in 1898:<sup>69</sup>

You will see by the paper that new pupils are to be enrolled tomorrow. I wonder how many will come ... I am rather dreading the first day I think it is always depressing ... No parents came today but perhaps they will come tomorrow ... I am going to try to go out a good deal. I think if you make yourself pleasant to people, it does good.

To describe the teaching load in these early years as demanding would be an understatement. Miss Ower, who was employed as a resident mistress in 1900–01 wrote:<sup>70</sup>

There were at that time seven boarders. Three quite big girls (15 or 16) two younger girls of about 12; two little girls of 8 or 9 & ... a small boy of about five ... [T]he two resident mistresses ... looked after them in every way ... We were their mothers, their nursemaids, their sick-nurses; we supervised their homework, their manners and morals; we read them stories and played games with them ... Before I went to bed I went round and looked at all the boarders to make sure they were still breathing; to see that they were all properly covered ... These duties performed, I prepared my lessons for the following day. We had to make a schedule, detailing every lesson we were to give during the week, & how we intended to present it to our victims. Miss Hughston’s brother was at this time on the staff ... there were staff meetings every few weeks, at which we had to give ‘an account of our stewardship’ to him and to Miss Hughston. I taught in every period of every school day ... And on Saturdays there was ‘laundry’—& mending; & on Sundays church in the morning & Sunday school, at home, in the afternoons.

Exhausted, Miss Ower went on sick leave at the end of 1901 and was never again a resident mistress.

67 Fitzpatrick, *PLC Melbourne*, 30.

68 Fintona Archive, Document 3, Violet Murdoch.

69 Annie Hughston, 6 February 1898.

70 Fintona Archive, Document 10, Jeannie Ower, *Some Memories*, c. 1943.



Figure 5: Miss Hughston with Kitty Craig (her niece) in 1903. The Melbourne-based members of the Hughston family supported Miss Hughston by sending their daughters to her school.

Source: Personal collection Dennis and Heale.

Despite the herculean efforts of the teachers, finances were a ‘close shave’ and compromises had to be made when employing staff.<sup>71</sup> In 1898 Miss Hughston engaged a Miss Sadleir, who ‘really had no testimonials’.<sup>72</sup> The competitor for this particular job had better references, more experience and was better at music. However, she also ‘taught drawing chiefly from drawings’ and, fatally, cost £36 plus keep whereas Miss Sadleir cost £40 in total. This need for pragmatism tempered Miss Hughston’s philosophy that:

Every teacher at Fintona is, as far as it can possibly be managed, required to teach only those subjects in which she has made herself a specialist. The person who is able to teach *everything* with equal facility, is usually incapable of teaching *anything* as it ought to be taught.<sup>73</sup>

71 Fintona Archive, Annie Hughston to William Hughston, 12 February 1898.

72 Fintona Archive, Annie Hughston to William Hughston, 12 February 1898.

73 Fintona Archive, Prospectus c. 1906.

Miss Hughston's choice of the motto *age quod agis*, which she interpreted as 'do one thing at a time, and do it thoroughly'<sup>74</sup> reflects the same thinking.

In the middle of 1899 Miss Hughston moved the school to a 'more commodious' house in Burke Road, north of Camberwell station, where more people were settling.<sup>75</sup> The school remained at this location for the rest of her ownership.

An event that Miss Hughston could not have foreseen in 1896 was the passing of the 1905 Act that made it illegal to run an unregistered school or employ an unregistered person as a teacher.<sup>76</sup> At this time Frank Tate was the permanent head of a reorganised Education Department.<sup>77</sup> Tate set about improving the standard of teaching and of accommodation in schools and, somewhat surreptitiously, pursued the establishment of state secondary schools. Most teachers supported aspects of this Act, but some saw the move into secondary schooling as 'destroy[ing] the free market for fee-paying education'.<sup>78</sup> The doomsayers would be proved right in part. In the 13 years following the passing of the Act, the number of private schools dropped from 757 to 499. Miss Hughston probably benefited from there being fewer schools competing for an independent school population that increased from 48,732 to 58,366.<sup>79</sup> The first lists of registered schools and teachers published in early 1907 show that her school was registered to teach at secondary, primary and sub-primary levels, and Miss Hughston herself was registered to teach secondary school based on her experience and qualifications.<sup>80</sup>

The numbers of pupils grew steadily. The increase was greater than that predicted from demography alone (Table 1); by 1912 there were 140 pupils and by 1920 about 450 (Figure 6). Other girls' schools in the region also experienced substantial increases between about 1911 and 1920; for example MLC increased from 310 to 514 (1913–21)<sup>81</sup> and Lauriston from 100 to 340 (1911–24).<sup>82</sup> However, the competitive nature of schools meant that success was not assured. Tintern struggled, perhaps because the principal 'went to the "wrong" church and knew the "wrong" sort of people',<sup>83</sup> and Ruyton, under an academically demanding principal who disliked administration, became unprofitable and closed transiently in 1913.<sup>84</sup>

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74 Fintona Archive, Document 3, Violet Murdoch.

75 'Advertising', *Argus*, 24 July 1899, 3; Fintona Archive, Document 6, Marion Wiseman, *Reminiscences of Fintona 1897–1901*, 1943.

76 Registration of Teachers and Schools Act 1905.

77 Sweetman et al., *A History of State Education in Victoria*, 171–84.

78 Peel et al., *A History of Hawthorn*, 79.

79 Sweetman et al., *A History of State Education in Victoria*, 270.

80 Victoria, *Government Gazette*, 29 January 1907, 489, 523.

81 Wood, *Seventy-Five Years at Methodist Ladies' College*, 79.

82 Rasmussen, *Lauriston*, 45, 64.

83 Lyndsay Gardiner, *Tintern School and Anglican Girls' Education 1877–1977* (Melbourne: Tintern, 1977), 50.

84 Theobald, *Ruyton Remembers*, 88.



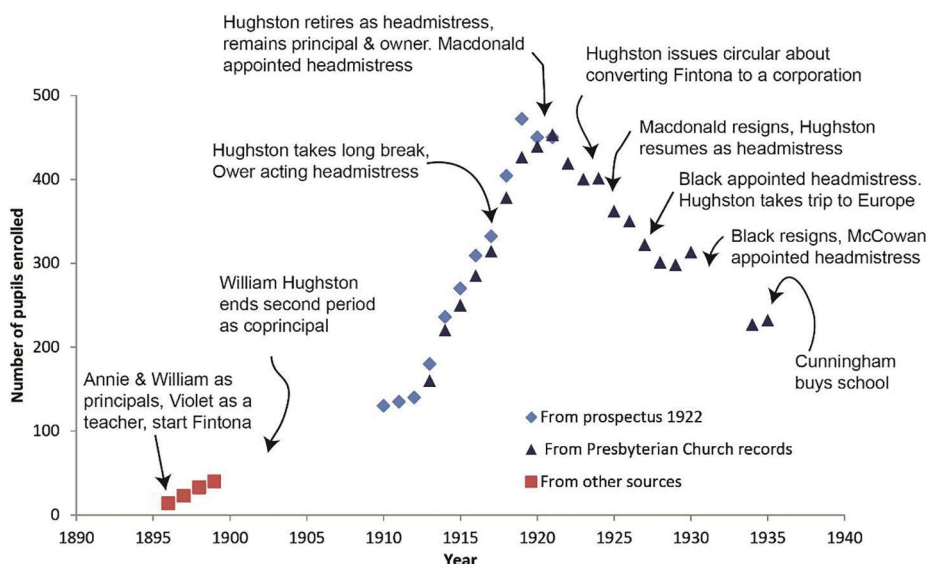


Figure 6: The rise and fall of pupil numbers at Fintona 1896 to 1934 linked to major events at the school.

Source: Authors' work.

## A school with personality

Miss Ower, who returned to teaching in 1905, used the word ‘personality’ to describe Fintona.<sup>85</sup> Miss Ower would become Miss Hughston’s longest-serving teacher and an important source of support. They were opposites in both physique and character. Miss Ower was ‘short and portly’<sup>86</sup> and outgoing. Her pupils remember the fascinating content of her lessons and her spontaneity of delivery as a highlight of their week.<sup>87</sup> Miss Ower outlined in verse the comprehensive, liberal education they aimed to deliver at Fintona:

So go and take this message forth to all your kith and kin—  
That they should come to Fintona if wisdom rare they’d win.  
We’ll teach them how to read the script on Tutankhamen’s tomb,  
And give them all the measurements of Shakespeares billiard-room.  
We’ll teach them how to Eat More Fruit and take some home today;  
How to Cross Crossings Cautiously—when nothing’s in the way.  
We’ll teach them to put safety First—for taking risks is sin—  
And we shall also teach them: ‘Nothing venture, nothing win.’  
That early rising’s healthful we shall show to be absurd,

<sup>85</sup> Fintona Archive, Document 10, Ower.

<sup>86</sup> Oral History Group Interview 13, Jean Gunn, 2009.

<sup>87</sup> Oral History Group Interview 28, Joan Gabb, 2010.

Because the early worm is snapped up by the bird.  
By very easy stages (for it can't be quickly done)  
We'll teach them that the world is round and heat comes from the sun.  
The politics of Ireland we'll make absolutely clear.  
The European tangle quite straight-forward will appear.  
We'll solve the burning question: 'What becomes of all the pins?'  
And **after** every boat-race we shall 'tip' the crew that wins!<sup>88</sup>

## The curriculum

The offerings at girls' schools in this period are conventionally divided into scholarly subjects and accomplishments. Social skills were held to be an essential part of a girls' preparation for life after school. 'The idea of a profession or, worse, a "job" for the young ladies of the Tintern College would never have crossed the mind of Emma B. Cook.'<sup>89</sup> As late as 1920 there was an expectation that the pupils of some independent schools 'would never *have* to work'.<sup>90</sup> The expectations of pupils were, however, more nuanced than these statements suggest. The upper ranks of society supplied many of the first female graduates and professionals, including one of the first teachers appointed by Miss Hughston. Miss Syme, a qualified teacher with a degree, was the daughter of the philanthropically inclined Symes of Tourmont in Balwyn.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, the reality for some girls was that work was a financial necessity. However, pupils did not need a full secondary education for most occupations and most got, at best, a few years of 'finishing' in an independent school.<sup>92</sup> Daisy Chancellor, who left Fintona in 1916, estimated that about 90 per cent of her class proceeded to a job or further education. If correct, this is high for the era. Of girls leaving school in the 1930s, 86 per cent of those at MLC and 73 per cent at Genazzano, girls' schools close to Fintona, went into jobs or training.<sup>93</sup> For most of the girls these occupations would be transient; the girls would not be in paid employment after marriage.

Miss Hughston was serious about scholarly education. She encouraged achievement by establishing, in about 1900, an unusual, non-competitive system of prizes such that '[t]he number of prizes was not limited, for whoever reached [a set] standard received a prize'.<sup>94</sup> She celebrated the passing of public examinations, entry to university and the gaining of degrees. Initially she taught all three of the matriculation mathematics subjects, the hardest of which was Euclid (geometry). Between 1896

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88 Jeannie Ower, 'General Information', *The Fintonian*, August 1923, 16–18.

89 Gardiner, *Tintern School*, 15.

90 Guile, *Clyde School*, 48.

91 Patricia O'Dwyer, 'The Symes of Tourmont (Tour Mont)', Balwyn Historical Society, 2011.

92 Residence time at PLC just over two years, Fitzpatrick, *PLC Melbourne*, 125; 1–3 years at Ruyton, Theobald, *Ruyton Remembers*, 33.

93 McCalman, *Journeyings*, 183–84.

94 Chilvers, *The History of Fintona*, 2.

and 1899 two Fintona girls entered for matriculation Euclid and passed.<sup>95</sup> This is notable given Fintona's size and immediately established it as competitive with older and larger private girls' schools. The leading church schools were way ahead; MLC entered 35 pupils for Euclid and PLC entered 116. Only PLC girls (13 per cent of them) gained honours. As the school expanded Miss Hughston withdrew from classroom teaching.

The serious intent of Miss Hughston's curriculum was also evidenced by her school's approach to music and science. In girls' schools music was both an academic subject and an accomplishment. It was the approach taken to the subject that defined its intellectual content. Between about 1910 and 1928 Isabel Knox managed the music program, including the components offered as 'extras'. For some of this time Miss Knox also held an appointment at the University of Melbourne's Conservatorium of Music. She wrote *The Rhythmic and Aural Method of Teaching Music, Part 1*, with a foreword by Annie Hughston.<sup>96</sup> The method seems to have worked. The girls were spectacularly successful in university examinations and, in 1925, on his way to becoming a prominent conductor, teacher and administrator in Melbourne music, Bernard Heinze conducted the school orchestra.<sup>97</sup>

When Miss Hughston matriculated there were no science subjects in the matriculation syllabus laid down by the university. Science was introduced in 1881, but only subjects that could be taught without a laboratory (physiology and botany) penetrated most girls' schools.<sup>98</sup> The argument for including science in the syllabus was that it trained pupils to make observations, evaluate evidence and draw inferences. When well taught, other subjects could teach pupils the same skills. Miss Ower described the teaching of geography thus:

There was no need to go far afield in those days for Geography excursions. Fields and open country came almost to our gates; & the creek that meandered through them provided examples in miniature of all the stunts a river can do.<sup>99</sup>

At the turn of the century, physics and chemistry were taught at PLC, but to only a few pupils; seven PLC girls entered for either or both of these subjects from 1896–99.<sup>100</sup> By 1909 physics and chemistry were the fourth and fifth most studied matriculation subjects, despite the fact they were not taught in most girls' schools.<sup>101</sup> Miss Hughston added physics and chemistry to her curriculum in about 1915.<sup>102</sup> These subjects were

95 Matriculation records 1896–99.

96 Isabel Knox, *The Rhythmic and Aural Method of Teaching Music, Part 1* (Sydney: W.H. Paling, 1929).

97 'School Speech Days', *Argus*, 15 December 1925, 4.

98 Ian R. Wilkinson, 'Science in Victorian Secondary Schools in the Late Nineteenth Century', *History of Education Review* vol. 17, no. 2 (1988): 63–78.

99 Fintona Archive, Document 2, Ower.

100 University of Melbourne Archive, Matriculation records.

101 'University of Melbourne. Public and Matriculation Examinations', *Argus*, 22 January 1909, 16.

102 Fintona Archive, Prospectus c. 1916.

still not available in most independent girls' schools; indeed physics would not be on offer in many of them for another 20 to 30 years.<sup>103</sup> Miss Hughston's reasons for bringing in more science may have been its relevance in times of technological change (e.g. transport, communications and power), and the number of girls starting medical degrees. Daisy Chancellor recalled that two out of about 11 in her class in 1916 entered medicine.<sup>104</sup> Unfortunately, we cannot analyse the uptake of physics at Fintona or other girls' schools, because after 1903 the preserved records do not link the names of matriculation candidates to their schools. Miss Hughston must have been committed to science education because the total number of girls in Victoria taking physics was low. She would have subsidised science teaching. Despite this, some girls intending to do science still moved to the better equipped PLC for their last years of schooling.<sup>105</sup>

Miss Hughston was also serious about equipping girls with social skills. She thought it important that the girls learn to be gracious hostesses.<sup>106</sup> In 1902 she encouraged parents who did not want a full secondary education for their daughters to nonetheless enrol them for 'such subjects as English Literature, Languages, Music, Painting, Elocution and Needlework'.<sup>107</sup> In 1920, to the applause of the all-male advisory committee of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria (PCV, see later), she introduced a senior, non-examination stream for girls who wanted 'to go on educating themselves for the duties of life'.<sup>108</sup> These duties included 'mothercraft' but apparently not cooking, because domestic science was not introduced until about 1930; nor, until the late 1920s, did they involve sex. According to Theobald,<sup>109</sup> sex education was often taught so obscurely ('your body is God's temple') that it was of little help to pupils. This also seems to have been true at Fintona. Girls of the late 1920s and early 1930s, when asked about sex education, were likely to respond that there was 'absolutely none, from anywhere'.<sup>110</sup>

Miss Hughston's support for both scholarship and accomplishments was not unusual. Although educationalists had long argued that education served women (and the nation) well whatever their occupation, educated women were expected to make their contribution to nation-building through their husbands and sons.<sup>111</sup> The headmistresses' association supported the pursuit of excellence in domesticity by establishing a syllabus for needlework.<sup>112</sup> In about 1920, Isabel Henderson, an

103 For example Lauriston (Rasmussen, *Lauriston*, 76) and Ruyton (Theobald, *Ruyton Remembers*, 108, 126, 128).

104 Interview with Daisy Chancellor, 1978.

105 Oral History Group Interview 28, Joan Gabb, 2010.

106 Dora Scales, Prue Gill and Suzy Chandler, Oral History Group, Release 2, 'The Education of an Educator', 2010, [www.fintona.vic.edu.au/our-community/alumni/memorabilia/history](http://www.fintona.vic.edu.au/our-community/alumni/memorabilia/history).

107 Fintona Archive, Prospectus c. 1902.

108 Presbyterian Church of Victoria (PCV) Archive, Report of the Schools Committee, May 1920.

109 Theobald, *Ruyton Remembers*, 123.

110 Lis Christensen and Mary Lush, *We Can Still Remember: Girls at School, 1912–1934* (Compact disk), Melbourne: Fintona Oral History Group, 2014, Track 8.

111 'Fintona Presbyterian Girls. Woman's Place in Nation Building', *Argus*, 15 December 1925, 4.

112 'School Speech Days. Fintona Grammar School', *Argus*, 14 December 1920, 8; Christensen and Lush, *We Can Still Remember*, Track 5.



owner-principal prominent in public discussions about education, ‘embraced the newly revived notion of education for woman’s “true” vocation—that of wife and mother’.<sup>113</sup> Miss Henderson and Miss Hughston were single, career women who both signed the 1891 Women’s Suffrage Petition. It seems inconsistent that, as women of achievement in their own right, they would readily accept their girls embarking on lives subordinate to men. However, these women were pragmatists and knew that most of their girls would follow the traditional expectations of marriage and family. Misses Henderson and Hughston’s expressed views and actions can also be interpreted as attempts to further the education of girls who would otherwise leave the school system. We should remember that this was a time when many children received no secondary schooling, and few completed it. When Miss Hughston introduced the non-examination stream, her school became overcrowded; therefore, whatever her motivation, it was not to increase enrolments.

## Physical education

Achievement in accomplishments and academic subjects was not enough for a comprehensive education:<sup>114</sup>

Miss Hughston was as keen about the ‘sound body’ as she was about the ‘sound mind’ ... I remember that on one occasion Miss Hughston called all the girls who had headed their forms for the week to come out and stand in a row before her. Trying not to look too elated by the honour done them, they obeyed. Miss Hughston gave them one long, comprehensive look, & said ‘Well you’re a poor palefaced lot! I shall arrange that you all spend more time at sport’.

Daily sessions of physical education probably occurred from the outset and were certainly in place by 1906, as they were in many schools. Games were the best form of exercise and ‘ample space’ was provided for them.<sup>115</sup> In 1907 and 1911 Miss Hughston bought, through mortgages, land adjoining the school, all of which was used for physical activities.

The open-air education philosophy took hold in Europe in the early 1900s. The first open-air school in Victoria was claimed to be Warwick Girls’ School in East Malvern, but in the same year as this report appeared, 1911, William Hughston started an open-air school for boys in Sandringham.<sup>116</sup> In 1912 Miss Hughston bought a neighbouring house, this time without a mortgage,<sup>117</sup> and in the next years

113 Marjorie R. Theobald, ‘Henderson, Isabella Thomson (Isabel) (1862–1940)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, [adb.anu.edu.au/biography/henderson-isabella-thomson-isabel-6631/text11423](http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/henderson-isabella-thomson-isabel-6631/text11423), published first in hardcopy 1983, accessed online 16 September 2018.

114 Fintona Archive, Document 2, Ower.

115 Fintona Archive, Prospectus c. 1906. Exercises were later contracted to the Bjelke Petersen Group, ‘Old Fintonians Celebrate Reunion’, *Argus*, 1 May 1924, 9.

116 Roberts and Lush, ‘William Hughston 1867–1930’.

117 Certificate of Title, vol. 02697 folio 294.

converted most of it to open-air classrooms. These had wire mesh on at least one side. The pupils within were protected from driving rain by lowering a canvas blind. In 1918 she bought and modified another house, this time for boarders, creating some open-air cubicles for bedrooms.<sup>118</sup> Even the sick bay was open-air.<sup>119</sup>

Open-air education was adopted because of its presumed efficacy in preventing the spread of infectious diseases. Until immunisation was widespread and antibiotics became available, disease resulted in absenteeism and sometimes death. In 1912 alone, 59 Victorian schools were temporarily closed because of outbreaks of diphtheria.<sup>120</sup> At Fintona the number of attendance prizes, given for not missing one day at school, rose from 18 in 1914 to 48 in 1915, a change Miss Hughston attributed to her open-air classrooms.<sup>121</sup> Another advantage of open-air classrooms was that they were cheap to build. Lots of schools had some. Fintona's open-air rooms remained a part of the school until Miss Hughston sold it. They are the aspect most cited, without resentment, by her last pupils as evidence of her 'advanced' ideas in education,<sup>122</sup> although by then they were an anachronism. Before leaving open-air education, we should mention the view of some historians that the proprietors of open-air schools were eugenicists. We have argued elsewhere that this term is misleading.<sup>123</sup> We have not found any record of Miss Hughston's views about genetics, but she was not associated with the extreme form of eugenics later practised in Nazi Germany. She admitted girls with disabilities and Jewish pupils, some of whom travelled from distant suburbs to reach Fintona.<sup>124</sup>

## Organisation and innovation

From the outset Miss Hughston established herself as receptive to ideas and her school as 'progressive'. Miss Syme was often exhorted by Miss Hughston to 'think hard, & find me a new idea'.<sup>125</sup>

A consistent theme throughout her years of ownership was that girls should be prepared for 'intelligent citizenship' and learn to behave appropriately in a range of situations.<sup>126</sup> From the start the girls held dances to which they invited boys.<sup>127</sup> This mixing of the sexes was seen by some as a form of 'moral decay' that divided the headmistresses of girls' schools for decades.<sup>128</sup> The girls were aware that they

118 Certificate of Title, vol. 02620 folio 523908; Reichl, *Fintona*, 24.

119 Fintona Archive, Oral History Group Interview 33, Jean Wilcox, 2010.

120 Claire Hooker and Alison Bashford, 'Diphtheria and Australian Public Health: Bacteriology and its Complex Applications, c. 1890–1930', *Medical History* 46, no. 1 (2002): 41–64.

121 Fintona Archive, Principal's Report 1915.

122 Christensen and Lush, *We Can Still Remember*, Track 4.

123 Roberts and Lush, 'William Hughston 1867–1930'.

124 Oral History Group Interview 28, Joan Gabb, 2010.

125 Fintona Archive, Document 6, Marion Wiseman, *Reminiscences of Fintona 1897–1901, 1943*.

126 Fintona Archive, Prospectus c. 1924.

127 Fintona Archive, Documents 5 and 7, Isabella Curwick and Louisa Powell (respectively) c. 1943.

128 Theobald, *Ruyton Remembers*, 123.

were participating in experiments. A pupil from the early 1900s commented that ‘sometimes the experiments were regrettable from [Miss Hughston’s] point of view but of huge interest to us’. One experiment was to allow the pianists among the girls to choose the hymn they played in morning assembly. “Earth is a desert dark and drear” was chosen so often that finally Miss Hughston ... stormed “Earth is not a desert dark and drear and Heaven is not your home. I will choose the hymns myself in future.”<sup>129</sup> Another experiment was the election of prefects. This too did not end well, resulting, in 1912, in the girls reporting in the school magazine their ‘shock’ at Miss Hughston deciding to appoint them herself.<sup>130</sup> Perhaps the most interesting thing about this event is that the girls were free to make such comment in public. Miss Hughston must have persisted with delegating tasks because in 1919 the advisory committee of the PCV reported that ‘both teachers and prefects are allowed more liberty, and undertake more responsibility than in most schools’.<sup>131</sup>

Experimentation continued in the 1920s with the Dalton plan and the house system. The Dalton plan aimed to develop the capacity of children in ‘self-help’ and ‘self-development’.<sup>132</sup> One of its requirements was that a syllabus be prepared for every pupil. ‘Modified’ versions were adopted as an experiment by Fintona, Ruyton and Rosbercon in 1923. Miss Macdonald, then the headmistress of Fintona (see later), reported that, although (at its best) the system built self-reliance, the results of the trial were mixed.<sup>133</sup> She noted that it worked better in some subjects, for some teachers and with older children. It did not obviate the need for classroom teaching and increased the workload of staff. It required a good library and had implications for the architecture of schools. Rosbercon persisted with the Dalton plan, but most aspects were abandoned at Fintona and Ruyton.

Miss Hughston and her staff were early adopters in 1923 of the house system<sup>134</sup> and progressively developed it in ways that appear to be unique, but which may have owed something to a Dalton-like plan called the Howard plan.<sup>135</sup> Initially a means of organising the school’s sporting program, the house system expanded to include work and conduct.<sup>136</sup> By the end of the 1920s houses were the unit of organisation of the school, giving it a vertical structure in which girls were in daily contact with older and younger pupils.<sup>137</sup> The house mistress gave continuity to the pastoral care of girls in contrast to the transient form system.

129 Fintona Archive, Document 5, Curwick.

130 Fintona Archive, *The Fintonian*, 1912.

131 PCV Archive, Report of Presbyterian Schools Committee, 1919.

132 Tisdall, *Forerunners*, 234–41.

133 ‘School Speech Days, Fintona Girls’ Grammar’, *Argus*, 13 December 1923, 6.

134 Tintern 1924 (Gardiner, *Tintern School*, 78), Ruyton 1924 (Theobald, *Ruyton Remembers*, 114), PLC 1929 (Fitzpatrick, *PLC Melbourne*, 167) and Lauriston 1930 (Rasmussen, *Lauriston*, 86).

135 Anon., ‘Summary of an address given to the Assistant Mistresses Association’, *Australian Educational Quarterly* 1 (1924): 35–36.

136 Fintona Archive, Principal’s Report, 1925.

137 Timing based on comparison of c. 1927 and 1932 prospectuses; *The Fintonian*, May 1928.

Miss Hughston was not herself registered to teach in primary schools, but she saw early childhood education as crucial. Her progressive thinking extended to the kindergarten and junior forms. From the outset she emphasised the importance of play in learning. The girls learned a language by acting Little Red Riding Hood in French,<sup>138</sup> and had a garden in which they grew things and ‘received their first lessons in team work’.<sup>139</sup> At some time before 1921 Miss Hughston selectively adopted the Montessori system.<sup>140</sup>

## ‘Recognition’ by the Presbyterian Church

The heads of most independent schools were committed Christians who saw faith as a part of education and the development of morals, thus distinguishing their offering from that of secular, state-run schools.<sup>141</sup> Nearly all independent schools had a close connection to a particular church or denomination, which in some cases was formalised as ‘recognition’, thereby entitling the school to incorporate the name of that denomination in its name. Some schools were owned by a denomination. Association with a church served as an endorsement. The educationally pointless competition between denominations that contributed to the 1872 Act had not been extinguished. The Presbyterian Church was still involved in education to ‘promote the interests of Presbyterianism’,<sup>142</sup> but its endorsement carried particular weight for girls’ schools because of that church’s involvement in academic education. In 1909 Fintona was recognised by the Presbyterian Church.<sup>143</sup>

Recognition served the purposes of both sides admirably. It was usual for private schools to hold daily religious assemblies and weekly scripture lessons. By associating with the Presbyterian Church, Miss Hughston undertook to use the Presbyterian hymn book (which she probably already did), have a Presbyterian minister take scripture in the senior classes (one already did<sup>144</sup>), and allow an annual inspection by an advisory committee to make sure ‘that religious instruction is systematically given, and that a good tone is maintained’.<sup>145</sup> The church specifically did not assume responsibility for school finances.<sup>146</sup> However, competition between independent girls’ schools was intense; if the church thought that Fintona was too remote from

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138 Christensen and Lush, *We Can Still Remember*, Track 3.

139 Oral History Group Interview 13, Jean Gunn, 2009.

140 Fintona Archive, Prospectus 1921.

141 For example Theobald, *Ruyton Remembers*, 144; University of Melbourne Archive, 78/66, IASTV Minutes, unidentified loose clipping within.

142 PCV Archive, Proceedings, November 1905.

143 PCV Archive, Proceeding of State Assembly, May 1909.

144 Fintona Archive, Prospectus c. 1906.

145 PCV Archive, Schools Committee, May 1913.

146 PCV Archive, Schools Committee, May 1918.



PLC to compete, that was not the thinking at PLC. In November of 1909, the state Assembly rebuked Rev. P. J. Murdoch (Walter Murdoch's brother) of Trinity Church in Camberwell for promoting Fintona.<sup>147</sup>

Miss Hughston's school was not particularly religious by the standards of the day. She chose a secular motto at a time when there was explicit mention of religion in many school mottos: 'the law of God is the lamp of life' (PLC); 'for God and home' (MLC); 'recte et fideliter', interpreted as 'upright and faithful' (Ruyton); and 'holiness, wisdom, strength' (Lauriston). Fintona's school song used a tune from the American civil war and its best verses, according to Miss Ower who wrote the other verses, had the distinction of being written by Walter Murdoch.<sup>148</sup> God is never mentioned, but there is evidence of commitment to other ideals. The song contains the usual sentiments that bedevil anthems, but it also has lines that suggest Miss Hughston's signing of the Women's Suffrage Petition in 1891 was not a casual act. At the time the song was written, women in Victoria had gained a vote in federal (1902) and state (1908) elections, but women in the United Kingdom were still involved in a violent campaign for their rights. The line, 'But though far and wide they wander for love or fortune or fame' seems to celebrate the widening of women's horizons beyond home and family and towards achievement in their own right.

## Miss Hughston as a proprietor

One pupil commented, 'I don't think it entered our heads that Miss Hughston was making an income from the school',<sup>149</sup> but she did. Most proprietors needed their school to provide them with an income during their working lives and, on retirement, to return their capital or continue to provide a regular income. Miss Hughston was no different and there are indications that she considered selling Fintona on several occasions.

Catherine Hughston had helpfully suggested to her daughter in 1904 that she should sell up and go farming when her current lease expired.<sup>150</sup> The next mention of a sale is in 1914 when the 'Lady Principal' reportedly asked the PCV if it was interested in acquiring Fintona in the future.<sup>151</sup> Miss Hughston turned 55 in 1914 and was entering her nineteenth year as proprietor. There was no urgency about her request. For the next 20 years the Schools' Committee of the PCV repeatedly suggested that the church should take over Fintona.

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147 PCV Archive, Proceedings of the State Assembly, November 1909.

148 Fintona Archive, Document 10, Ower.

149 Oral History Group Interview 13, Jean Gunn, 2009.

150 Fintona Archive, Catherine Hughston (assumed) to William Hughston, 30 January 1904.

151 PCV Archive, Schools Committee, May 1914.



Figure 7: Miss Hughston (left) with Miss Macdonald (right) who took up the position of headmistress in mid-1921. Miss Hughston resumed the role herself at the end of 1924.

Image: *Australasian*, 10 May 1924, 61, via Trove.

Miss Hughston started to withdraw from daily involvement in the school when she and her adopted daughter Betty (see later) took an extended break with the Murdochs in Western Australia in 1917, leaving Miss Ower in charge. In 1920 Miss Hughston probably separated her living arrangements from those of the boarders by buying a neighbouring house, and further removed herself in 1922 when she moved to Balwyn.<sup>152</sup> In 1921 she appointed Isobel Macdonald as headmistress while remaining owner and principal herself. Prior to this appointment Miss Macdonald was principal of a Presbyterian school in New Zealand. Miss Hughston would appoint headmistresses for all but two of the remaining 14 years that she owned Fintona.

By 1920 Fintona was so successful that it was severely overcrowded and faced with restricting pupil numbers in the short-term and mounting a building program in the longer term.<sup>153</sup> Miss Hughston owned the goodwill of Fintona and all of the land, equipment and buildings used, except for the flagship mansion, which the owners declined to sell. The need to expand, combined with the need of Miss Hughston (now in her early 60s) to secure a retirement income while allowing for the continuation of her school, presumably led to her taking an option in 1923 on Holmbush, a large house in Hawthorn with 2.5 hectares of land.<sup>154</sup> To buy this

<sup>152</sup> Land title vol. 1706 folio 341086.

<sup>153</sup> Fintona Archive, Isobel Macdonald, Headmistresses report, 1921.

<sup>154</sup> Fintona Archive, "Holmbush." The Proposed New Fintona College', Circular, 1923.

property she proposed creating a company. Most school companies today are ‘not-for-profit’ organisations, but Miss Hughston, perhaps following a lead from Isabel Henderson’s disposal of Clyde, proposed a company in which the shareholders would be paid a dividend. The proposal was marketed as being both good for the education of girls and profitable. The details are interesting for the insight they give on the profitability of Fintona. Using data in the circular, which was based on past performance, we estimate that the annual dividend distribution could have been as high as £2,400. The annual profit was probably substantially more, as some surplus would have been ploughed back into the school. If there were around 500 students enrolled in the relocated school, each student would effectively contribute around £5 to annual profit, equivalent to approximately 20 per cent of the basic fee for the final year of secondary school.<sup>155</sup> Miss Hughston owned the present day equivalent of 11 blocks of land,<sup>156</sup> buildings (excluding the flagship mansion), contents and the goodwill of her school. In the proposed company she would have 50 per cent ownership, giving her effective control, and a handsome annual income of £900.

We do not know why Miss Hughston did not proceed to issue a full prospectus, but it is possible that there was insufficient interest from potential subscribers. Other schools experienced this problem. For example, in 1921, although Isabel Henderson accepted the amount, Clyde only managed to raise £7,500 of the target £20,000.<sup>157</sup> As far as we know, Miss Hughston did not again attempt to form a company. Her temperament may not have been suitable for self-promotion in an advertising campaign.

There is one further aspect of the proposal to form a company that is disappointing. Miss Hughston named five people as directors in addition to herself. This was an opportunity for her to contribute in a tangible way to the advancement of women, but she did not seize it. All of the people she nominated were men.

The decline of pupil numbers from their peak (Figure 6) to about 400 students in 1924 was the result of a policy decision to contain the size of the school,<sup>158</sup> but the enrolments did not stabilise at this level. Miss Macdonald left at the end of 1924. The Rev. Cameron stated at the 1924 speech night ‘that Miss Hughston ... who had retired four years ago owing to ill health, was again to resume the direction of the college’.<sup>159</sup> As this is the first mention we have found of ill health, this explanation for Miss Macdonald’s appointment to and departure from the school is not entirely convincing. It cannot be ruled out, however, because at some time in the later part of her life Miss Hughston developed diabetes.

155 Fintona Archive, Prospectus c. 1921.

156 Certificates of title to land purchases by Miss Hughston, excluding those already listed are vol. 02302 folio 214 (1920), vol. 2075 folio 414062 (1920), vol. 2056 folio 411187 (1923, mortgage discharged 1926).

157 Guile, *Clyde School*, 98.

158 PCV Archive, Schools Committee, May 1920.

159 ‘Speech Days’, *Argus*, 19 December 1924, 18.

When Miss Hughston departed in 1927 for a year in Europe with Betty, pupil numbers had decreased to about 320. Miss Marjorie Black was appointed headmistress. Interestingly, in an interview conducted in 1972, she referred to herself as having been the ‘acting headmistress’.<sup>160</sup> Miss Black was previously employed by the YWCA to work with adolescent girls. A feminist interested in psychology, she thought ‘the teen age is the period when the battle for an honest, pure, clear, righteous type of womanhood must be waged and won’.<sup>161</sup> Her ideas were welcomed by some but shocked others—she smoked and sometimes showed her knees!<sup>162</sup> Pupil numbers declined slightly during her tenure, which lasted until the end of 1930 when she resigned to run her own school in New Zealand.

The next appointee was Miss Jeannie McCowan. She was a teacher at PLC who, through her role in the Assistant Mistresses Association of Victoria, had worked on examination policy and teacher training. Another interest was teachers’ salaries, in which she tried to reduce the differential between men and women’s pay.<sup>163</sup> Unpopular with girls and staff, the blame for a further drop in student numbers (Figure 6) is often laid at her door.<sup>164</sup> The school operated at a loss during one year of her tenure, 1931.<sup>165</sup>

Overall, between 1921 and 1929, Fintona ‘lost’ about 150 pupils, 50 of them planned. Yet the population of Camberwell continued to grow apace (Table 1) and nearby MLC increased by 230 pupils.<sup>166</sup> Between 1926 and 1930, state school enrolments in Victoria dropped by 3 per cent but those at independent schools rose by 5 per cent.<sup>167</sup> The conclusion that on average independent schools did not suffer a loss of enrolments during the Great Depression is not altered by extending the time frame to 1934. But the Depression’s effect on schools was uneven; all of the schools for which we have data suffered at least a transient drop in new enrolments. Nonetheless it is clear that Fintona suffered a particularly marked decline. Closure looked likely for Miss Hughston’s school. In dealing with the decline of Lauriston as the Irving sisters aged, Rasmussen suggests the problem was not the Depression but that the Irvings had allowed the school to run down.<sup>168</sup> Miss Hughston’s school, however, was not run-down. The teachers were not particularly old and some of them, for example Misses Penington, Cunningham, Hay (Iris), McCowan and Chilvers, would go on to prestigious careers. Dr Dora Scales, who entered Fintona

160 Marjorie Black, Interview by Mary Rose Goggs, 27 August 1972, transcript, J. D. Somerville Oral History Collection, OH 561/6, State Library of South Australia.

161 Marjorie Black, ‘The Adolescent Girl and the Y.W.C.A.’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 January 1920, 4.

162 Christensen and Lush, *We Can Still Remember*, Track 6.

163 Marjorie Theobald, ‘Women Teachers’ Quest for Salary Justice in Victoria’s Registered Schools, 1915–1946’, *Melbourne Studies in Education* 25, no. 1 (1983): 1–43.

164 Joan Gillison, *Margaret Cunningham of Fintona* (Melbourne: Fintona Girls’ School, 1982), 65.

165 Fintona Archive, Jeannie McCowan School Report, 1934.

166 Wood, *Seventy-Five Years at Methodist Ladies’ College*, 79.

167 Wray Vamplew, *Australians: Historical Statistics* (Sydney: Fairfax, Syme and Weldon Associates, 1987), 338.

168 Rasmussen, *Lauriston*, 86.

as a boarder in 1934 and would herself become an educationalist, referred to the school having a ‘marvellously active attitude to education’.<sup>169</sup> Rather the problem may have been that ‘[the] private-venture girls’ ... schools [were] inseparable in the public mind from their powerful, charismatic owner-principals, who saw themselves (with some justification) as both pioneer figures and pace-setters in the education of girls’.<sup>170</sup> At Fintona, ‘Miss Hughston was the head and front of everything—the moving spirit behind the whole of the schools activities’.<sup>171</sup> Even the partial withdrawal of these owner-principals from the day-to-day management of their schools may have inevitably weakened those schools in the public’s mind. Added to this would have been well-founded uncertainty about the long-term future of privately owned schools.<sup>172</sup>

In 1929 Miss Margaret Cunningham was appointed as science mistress. She knew Miss Hughston and Betty and spent time with them during their 1927–28 trip to Europe.<sup>173</sup> Miss Cunningham had access to family capital and was a well-qualified teacher with strong ideas about education. While still in Miss Hughston’s employ, she pursued plans to open her own school at Tourmont in Balwyn. She promoted her school to some Fintona parents, who agreed to transfer their girls to Miss Cunningham’s school when it opened.<sup>174</sup> Instead, at the end of 1934, Miss Hughston sold the goodwill of Fintona to Miss Cunningham for the value of the annual fees of the pupils already enrolled for 1935.<sup>175</sup> Fintona continued at its Burke Road site in 1935 and then moved to Balwyn. Some sources suggest that relations between Miss Hughston and Miss Cunningham became and remained strained.<sup>176</sup> Miss Hughston may, not without reason, have felt that she had been white-anted. Miss Cunningham may have felt obstructed by Miss Hughston’s failure to attend some of the functions associated with the hand over on the grounds of ill health.<sup>177</sup> However, on balance it is likely that Miss Hughston was pleased to see her school continue. In the future Hughston descendants would be enrolled at Fintona and Miss Hughston was content to remain a creditor. We estimate that Miss Cunningham still owed most or all of the cost of the goodwill when Miss Hughston died in 1943.<sup>178</sup>

169 Scales et al., ‘The Education of an Educator’.

170 Theobald, ‘Women Teachers Quest for Salary Justice’.

171 Fintona Archive, Document 2, Ower.

172 Tisdall, *Forerunners*, 225.

173 *Fintonian*, 1928, 12.

174 Oral History Group Interview 44, Beryl Beaurepaire, 2011.

175 Gillison, *Margaret Cunningham of Fintona*, 68.

176 Oral History Group Interview 44, Beryl Beaurepaire, 2011.

177 Gillison, *Margaret Cunningham of Fintona*, 75.

178 PROV, VPRS series 28/P3, unit 3800, Probate and Administration Files, Annie Hughston.





Figure 8: Still elegant, Miss Hughston near the end of her time as owner-principal. She sold Fintona in 1934 when she was aged 75.

Source: Collection Fintona Girls' School.

## Contributions to the wider community

Independent schools like Miss Hughston's served their own pupils well, but it is less clear how well they served Victorian pupils as a whole. Did the independent school sector, through its resistance to the state's involvement in secondary education, restrict the availability of secondary schooling? This question is beyond the scope of this paper except for a mention of Miss Hughston's involvement with the Incorporated Association of Secondary Teachers of Victoria, later known as the Incorporated Association of Registered Teachers of Victoria (IARTV). We also look briefly at her use of scholarships.

In the elections following the passing of the 1905 Act, Miss Hughston was elected to the first council of the IARTV.<sup>179</sup> This council housed conflicts of interest. At one of the first general meetings of the membership, Misses Henderson and Morris, both council members, spoke against their own council's motion. That motion, which would have excluded state secondary teachers from membership, was defeated. In reporting this meeting, the press contributed to the invisibility of women by mentioning only the contributions of men. The minutes of the IARTV do not record, in this or any other meeting, Miss Hughston's opinions. She may have had more impact as a member of a committee that, in 1909, published a paper called 'Co-ordination of work in the sub-primary and primary grades of secondary schools'.<sup>180</sup> She was again on the council from 1917 to 1921 but it is not clear what she contributed or hoped to gain. She was an infrequent attendee of meetings (of 29 meetings held she attended 13). She may simply have found that 'running the school takes all my time and strength'.<sup>181</sup>

From about 1901, Miss Hughston offered scholarships 'to promising pupils who would otherwise be unable to continue their education'.<sup>182</sup> The numbers on offer were not particularly generous—in 1920 there were two. Then as now, scholarships promoted the school's name at little cost. Before and early in the era of state secondary schools, the state made secondary education available to selected pupils by offering scholarships that were tenable in independent schools. Some independent schools did not accept these scholars because they thought they would lower the tone of the school,<sup>183</sup> but others would simply not have had any applicants. Between 1896 and

179 University of Melbourne, accession 1978.0066, minutes of the IARTV.

180 Co-ordination Committee of The Incorporated Association of Secondary Teachers of Victoria, 'Co-ordination of work in the sub-primary and primary grades of secondary schools: Report' (Melbourne: IASTV, 1909).

181 Fintona Archive, Document 1, Powell.

182 'Advertising', *Argus*, 14 January 1901, 3; 'School Speech days: Fintona Grammar School', *Argus*, 14 December 1920, 8.

183 Fitzpatrick, *PLC Melbourne*, 103; Theobald, *Ruyton Remembers*, 74.

1921, only 69 of 257 'ordinary' scholarships were offered to girls.<sup>184</sup> MLC and PLC were the main independent schools accepting these students. Fintona and Korowa accepted one pupil each.

Between 1920 and 1927 Miss Hughston was on the committee of management of the Boroondara Kindergarten in Richmond. She knew the directors. Gwladys Barker, the foundation director, and Bella Sutton, the director while Miss Hughston was in office, were both former pupils at Fintona. In a marked departure from her usual avoidance of public office, she was either president or vice president from 1922 to 1925.<sup>185</sup> These unpaid committees of management were an outlet for capable, well-off women. Miss Hughston's experience in developing Fintona was directly relevant to the kindergarten because it bought land and relocated during her period of membership. The Boroondara Kindergarten was part of the free kindergarten movement established in 1908 to 'develop proper habits and strong characters' in children, particularly in the poorer parts of inner Melbourne who were not a source of pupils for independent schools.

Aged in her late 40s or early 50s, Miss Hughston became a single parent when she took on the upbringing of a child born in 1907 or 1908,<sup>186</sup> who would be known as Betty Hughston. There was no Adoption Act in force in Victoria until 1929, so she was probably never formally adopted, although Miss Hughston refers to Betty in her will as her adopted daughter.<sup>187</sup> The first record we have of Betty is in 1913 when she received a kindergarten gift.<sup>188</sup> At school she was good at sport, and later was employed at Fintona as a sports mistress.<sup>189</sup> Miss Hughston's great nieces remember Betty as a warm-hearted member of the family with a taste for rally driving.<sup>190</sup> In 1933 Miss Hughston transferred one of the titles to land that made up Fintona to Betty, plus the title to their Balwyn home. Another title was transferred in 1938. Miss Hughston's old age was complicated by diabetes, but she was cared for by Betty, who was also her executor. Betty married when she was 39, after Miss Hughston's death, and died in 1983 aged 75.<sup>191</sup>

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184 PROV, VPRS 14006/P0001, State scholarships for secondary students. Regulation xxi 1.

185 Beryl M. Hooley, *The Hope of Many Tomorrows: A Historical Sketch of Boroondara Kindergarten Richmond* (Melbourne: Spectrum Publications, 1987).

186 Betty died on 8 November 1983 aged 75, so she could have been born any time between 9 November 1907 and 8 November 1908.

187 Will of Annie Hughston.

188 'School Speech Days', *Argus*, 17 December 1913, 11.

189 Fintona Archive, Prospectus c. 1932.

190 Interview with Dennis and Heale.

191 Deaths in the State of Victoria No. 25668/83.



Figure 9: Betty Hughston, date unknown. Betty was informally adopted as a young child by Miss Hughston. She was a valued member of the Hughston family and inherited most of Miss Hughston's estate.

Source: Personal collection Dennis and Heale.



What were the circumstances that brought Betty into Miss Hughston's care? In the death notice Betty placed she referred to Miss Hughston as her aunt,<sup>192</sup> although the great nieces' opinion is that she was not genetically related to them. We do not know what motivated Miss Hughston to adopt, but in the course of working with so many girls and young women, and having two medical practitioners in the family, she must have known quite a few 'unmarried mothers'. Another possibility is that Betty came to her attention through the free kindergartens. If so, Betty might have been a ward of state, but we have not been able to identify her in the registers.<sup>193</sup> The account passed down to Miss Hughston's great niece Catherine Dennis was that Betty was illegitimate and that her natural uncle 'came to see the family and so made sure that Betty would be well cared for'.<sup>194</sup>

## Legacy

A successful business offers the right thing, at the right time and in the right place, sometimes as much through luck as skill. Miss Hughston had her share of luck in the timing of economic recovery and the effects of government regulation, but she also made her 'luck' by locating her school in an area that would prove receptive to her competencies as an educator and administrator. She was an early adopter of ideas in education, and her pupils had a wider range of opportunities in a more tolerant environment than most. We tend to assume that the continuity of a school says something about the quality of its foundation, but many good schools closed, and many continuing schools did so in little more than name. For some 40 years after Miss Hughston sold Fintona, it remained vertically integrated, with a non-competitive prize system, and outdoor exercises in winter to make up for inadequate heating. Today, some schools have introduced vertical integration as if it were a new idea, the role of competition remains contentious and exercise has renewed importance. Miss Hughston's nature at least partly explains why she has been overlooked by historians of education. On the one hand, she shared a house with boarders for most of her working life and appeared before hundreds of girls each day, but on the other she was intensely private, and left few records of her life and work. Reserved rather than charismatic, she remains a stately but somewhat austere and mysterious figure.

Annie Hughston, and other female proprietors, offered their pupils a view of non-standard options for women. They did so through their very existence—that of single women running complex businesses exposed to regulatory and other risks and without the benefit of any state aid. Although the stereotype of these schools is

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192 'Family Notices', *Argus*, 17 April 1943, 2.

193 PROV, VPRS 4527, Ward Registers, for 1910 and 1912 (1911 was not available).

194 Letter from Catherine Dennis to Mary Lush, 18 January 2015.



one of rigidity and social conservatism, in fact many were more flexible than their church and state counterparts, both able and prepared to experiment. The best of the ‘lady principals’ were strong women with business acumen and high ideals for the education of girls. Miss Hughston, who for most of her long career had no personal or professional partners, stands out among them. Her achievements were hers alone.

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