



Building Somerville's story, brick by brick

For Somerville House students, old and new, every corner of the School tells a story. Students leave their mark with accolades won, speeches given, friendships forged – each part of the School holds a memory. Those memories will become even more tangible with the Foundation's personalised brick campaign, which will see the stories of former students and Somerville families become an integral part of the Heritage Heart restoration and Senior Precinct development.

Earlier this year, members of the Somerville community were invited to support the rejuvenation and restoration of the Heritage Heart, the oldest part of the School, by purchasing a named brick or commemorative plaque (or both). Personalised bricks will blend seamlessly with the School's heritage-listed buildings, Cumbooquepa, the Chapel and Chambers while adding depth and history to newer, updated facilities.

We've been encouraged by an overwhelmingly positive response with over \$150,000 raised already.

Our initial aim was to honour the School's remarkable past while building our future with personalised bricks

incorporated in an architectural design on retaining walls at the front of A Block; however, the level of interest from the Somerville community prompted a change of plan.

We now view this campaign as an ongoing project since it would be disappointing to commit prematurely to erecting the Heritage Heart display after only 'campaigning' for a few months.

By extending the campaign's timeframe many more will celebrate their connection to the School.

The first chapter of this story will now begin with a series of commemorative walls honouring founding Principal Miss Eliza Fewings (1899 – 1909) and

her immediate successors Principals Constance Harker (1910 – 1931) and Marjorie Jarrett (1910 – 1940). The walls will stand adjacent to A block.

Alongside the names of these visionary changemakers will be those of our 'Foundation students' – the first two hundred and twenty-four students enrolled at the School between 1899 and 1909.

Some of these original students were highlighted in Dick Paten's article on page 28. The Paten sisters – May, Ness, Pearl and Win – led extraordinary lives, and blazed a trail for women by following the lead of their mentor, Miss Fewings. The three younger sisters were amongst the thirty-one students, and five teachers, who followed Miss Fewings to the new school she established – the Brisbane High School for Girls, which later became Somerville House – after she was dismissed as headmistress of Brisbane Girls Grammar School – reportedly for her efforts to improve the curriculum and introduce external examinations, offering girls the same educational opportunities as boys.

Their names, and those of other Foundation students, will inspire students each day. Brick by brick, this display will enhance the Heritage Heart as a truly historic and unique part of the School and tell the story of Somerville's past and present.

The Paten sisters' story is one of many highlighted by this project. As members of the Somerville community purchased engraved bricks, the School's archival records uncovered family links and treasured histories. The wealth of history in the archives, celebrates achievement and accomplishment over more than one hundred years.

No one could have anticipated how fascinating the 'named brick' campaign would become. We considered the approaches of other schools, but boys' schools didn't have to grapple with the vagaries of women's names changing through marriage(s) and the desire to record maiden names so friends could recognise former classmates. A family tree, if you will.

It was a current father, who expressed interest in bricks for his mother, sister and daughter, but who overlooked a fourth generation with a grandmother who graduated in 1925, who first suggested we group families together.

We took that suggestion on board so, rather than grouping named bricks in chronological order by graduating year, decided to let donors' preference rule and to place 'their' bricks as specified.

This will let us celebrate the strong links between Somerville students, grouping sisters together, for instance Julie and Louise Salisbury (Class of 2012 and 2016).

Grace Tudehope's wizardry was employed as she created literally hundreds of illustrations for bricks and pavers, then plaques once people expressed their reticence at being 'underfoot'. We fell down the proverbial rabbit hole researching maiden names and year of graduation or class, grouping families in tiers by generation and did our best to convey a complex network of relationships.

Bricks will be ordered by year of graduation or alphabetically by either surname or maiden name, depending upon preference, with families grouped

together even where an individual has a different surname from other family members.

Commemorative plaques allow more flexibility, enabling fathers' names to be displayed alongside wives, daughters and/or granddaughters.

Each brick will fit like a piece of a puzzle, a living family tree of Somerville sisterhood which can be added to over time. Current parents are committing their support to bricks with their daughters' future graduation year, so the feature wall, which will now take pride of place in the Senior Precinct, will connect the past with the future.

This feature wall will be like no other – a 21st Century, etched stainless steel 'brick' installation. A focal point in the new Senior Precinct which will celebrate students, past and present, in a way that no other School has endeavoured. It is the meticulously maintained archival records that enable us to capture familial relationships, and an enduring affiliation, with the School over generations.

Dr Coralie Porter (Class of 1954) with her daughters and granddaughter, consented to their family being used to illustrate, on the enclosed gift card, how three generations would appear. Anyone else interested in supporting this initiative is also invited to return for a formal photograph at Cumbooquepa. Featured below is the Porter family, our very first supporters.

Both Mrs Elizabeth Gilchrist AM (Class of 1962) and Dr Russell Bird, mentioned in 'The message from the Foundation Chair' page 26, committed to 'family bricks'. The Gilchrist family connection to the School is also over three generations.

Drs Russell and Elizabeth Bird's connection will be captured by thirteen bricks going back to 1924. Their bricks will include their four daughters, all Old Girls, along with a number of in-laws – also Old Girls.

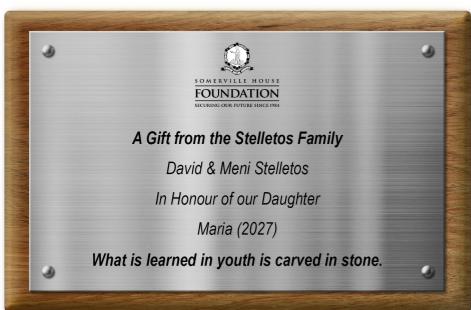
Somerville House is known for its strength in the arts and sciences, and counts renowned artists, scientists, doctors, educators, authors, musicians, and athletes amongst its alumnae. Their names will be among those of future graduates, who will undoubtedly bring new achievements, marking their place in history.

Commemorative plaques will honour former students and benefactors. A 'special service' wall will acknowledge individual contributions to the School, for instance: Dux of each graduating year; School Captains, Vice-Captains; House and Sports Captains; Prefects; OGA, P&F and Foundation representatives' names will ensure their legacy is never forgotten. We are fortunate indeed that our remarkable archival records will facilitate this ambitious plan.

Engaging with a number of families and seeing this initiative evolve has been fascinating. Both Grace Tudehope and I have become genealogical sleuths and have thoroughly enjoyed learning more about the School itself and the families that make Somerville House so unique.

Lest anyone feel hesitant to put a single name forward – know that I did, just as I had for my son at his school.

Seize this opportunity to be part of the next chapter of Somerville's story, named bricks and commemorative plaques will be available for only limited time.



To explore various options, please contact either:

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Scan the QR code to view illustrations for the Trailblazers Wall (peer year), Family Tree Wall or Special Service Wall.



Left to right: Dr Yvette Porter (Class of 1995), Elise Wilson (Class of 1989), Dr Coralie Porter (Class of 1954), Dr Neroli Porter (Class of 1987), and Lila (Class of 2027).