Princes Men
Masculinity at Prince Alfred College
1960 – 1965

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# Table of Contents

Abstract  
Declaration  
Acknowledgments

## Chapter 1: Introduction

- Gender, schooling and history 2
- Historical Images of masculinity 16
- Prince Alfred College 1869-1965 24
- South Australia and Adelaide in the 1960s 31
- Methodology 33

## Chapter 2: Religion

- Methodism 47
- Religious instruction 51
- School chaplain: Kyle Waters 55
- The Headmaster’s addresses 62
- Summary 66

## Chapter 3: Princes Men

- Being a PAC boy 70
- Not fitting the mould 84
- Summary 93

## Chapter 4: School Culture and Impact

- The development of school culture 95
- School impact 103
Abstract

This study is an oral history based on interviews with fifty men who left Prince Alfred College (PAC) between 1960-65. The aim was to define the codes of masculinity that were accepted and taught at the school and any other definitions of masculinity that were occurring simultaneously.

Prince Alfred College was established in 1869 as a Wesleyan Methodist boys’ college in Adelaide, South Australia. The school was based on the British model and promoted muscular Christianity right through to the 1960s. This was achieved throughout the school which was immersed in Christian ethics. Sport, discipline, Cadets, Scouts, academia and school culture were used as themes to promote ethics such as helping those less fortunate, being a team player, winning and losing with grace, being honest, being fair, accepting consequences to one’s actions, respecting one’s elders and knowing that your actions affect those around you.

A Christian gentleman was defined as an upright, good citizen, a credit to the school, a leader, useful in the community, of sound body and mind. He was expected to strive to the best of his ability and not to give up when things went wrong. Boys were taught to follow Christian ideals and teachings as a way of life rather than just a part of life, reflecting the Methodist culture. PAC gave the boys a good preparation for life by creating self confident, Christian gentlemen to become leaders in the community.

There are many different definitions of masculinity operating at any given point in time and the boys at PAC had many different ways of expressing their masculinity. The ethics of muscular Christianity and the Christian gentlemen were entwined
throughout the school and both were acceptable definitions of masculinity. Cadets and sport highlighted muscular Christianity whereas, Scouts and academia emphasized the Christian gentlemen. Prince Alfred College was very successful in transmitting a Methodist emphasis of these codes of masculinity as all of those interviewed described these ethics and many stated how they use them in their lives today.