In 1934, the editor of the *Courier-Mail*’s women’s page, Winifred Moore, reflected on the growth and importance of women’s clubs in Queensland in the early decades of the twentieth century. Moore herself had been involved in community organisations since she took up her career in journalism during World War I. She was a foundation member of the National Parks Association, a member of the Press Association, the Queensland Women’s Electoral league (QWEL) and the Lyceum Club. Many of her contemporaries shared what she called ‘the club habit’, a habit that had enabled women to ‘find their tongues in public assemblies’ in the decades after they achieved the vote (*Courier-Mail*, 8 February 1934, 16). As she wrote her column, Moore may have been thinking of a particular woman: her friend Irene Longman (1877–1964), who had been elected to the Queensland Legislative Assembly in 1929, only to lose her seat at the next election.

In her column, Moore described how clubs helped women to realise their citizenship: in the public speaking and debating circles that clubs sponsored, women could discuss ideas and develop their ‘naturally thin’ voices to resonate in large spaces. The historian Linda Kerber has made a similar point about the role of such groups in the growth of women’s citizenship in America, observing that in this period, study and book discussion groups were key sites of women’s intellectual development, where they discovered their abilities as orators and learnt to use authority in public, not just private, settings (Kerber 1997: 228). Irene Longman was undoubtedly a beneficiary of this training. Press reports of her campaign and letters to the editor frequently comment on her voice and presence. A report in the *Queensland Figaro* is typical: ‘Mrs Longman is an earnest quiet speaker. She has a pleasant voice, a big heart, and a big mind full of plans and reforms for the future.’ (4 May 1929, 11). According to Moore, ‘the club habit’ offered personal enrichment as well: ‘It has been said that while a man uses his club to get away from people — or maybe to get away from himself — a woman joins a club to be herself and to meet more congenial people.’

This article describes how ‘the club habit’ contributed to Irene Longman’s electoral success. Although her public life was characterised by the overlapping memberships that were typical of many of her contemporaries, I will focus on her involvement in the Lyceum Club, because this was where her significant networks intersected. Its reading circles and debating groups reinforced her interest in books and ideas. It was the place where she was afforded the opportunity to ‘be herself’
and to meet the congenial people who later supported her political candidature and campaign.

Longman was elected to the Queensland Legislative Assembly almost three decades after the Commonwealth Franchise Act 1902 extended the right to vote and to stand for election to white women. In 1903, four women had stood for election to the federal parliament. Two decades later, Edith Cowan was elected to the Western Australian Legislative Assembly in 1921. In Queensland, white women were granted the right to vote in state elections in 1905, but were not eligible to stand for election until 1915 (McCulloch 2005: 160). Irene Longman took her seat in 1929, having defeated the sitting Labor member in Bulimba, a working-class constituency in south Brisbane. Following an electoral redistribution, Longman re-contested Bulimba in 1932 but lost the seat as Labor swept back to power. No other woman was elected to the state’s parliament until after Irene Longman’s death at the age of 87. Annabelle Rankin was elected to represent Queensland in the Senate in 1946.

How did Longman’s electoral success come about? Patricia Fallon has written a detailed account of Longman’s life and political career in her thesis, ‘So hard the conquering’ (2002), but — perhaps because the Labor Party was so dominant in Queensland politics, and women so absent — accounts of women’s political history in Australia have overlooked Longman. While the nineteenth-century campaigns for suffrage have been closely examined, women’s few electoral successes in the years after suffrage have received less attention than their failures. In What were they thinking? James Walter observes that, in the early years of the Commonwealth, many women activists pursued reform through networking, lobbying and involvement in voluntary organisations, rather than through parliamentary means (Walter 2010: 125). His account of the activism of first-wave feminists such as Rose Scott and Vida Goldstein seeks to explain why their ‘passions’ had a limited impact on dominant political ideas. He attributes this to their failure to access ‘the parliamentary theatre in which ideological differences were acted out’ (2010: 127) and to the diverse and conflicting interests and affiliations of those associated with the ‘Woman Movement’. He does not consider the political careers of Longman or Cowan.

In Brisbane, a cross-generational group of women supported Longman’s candidature, and shared her engagement with feminist ideas and her advocacy for women. The networks through which they came together to achieve reform and to realise their citizenship were dense and intersecting. On the conservative side of politics, one key figure stands out: the ‘eccentric suffragette’ Margaret Ogg (1863–1953), who campaigned to ensure that women acted on their new right to vote and who was a driving force in QWEL, as well as other women’s and welfare organisations in Brisbane. Ogg’s unwavering commitment to seeing women in parliament resulted in QWEL’s nomination of Longman, and her endorsement by the Country Progressive National Party (CPNP). By this time, QWEL could boast some 28,000 members, and Ogg turned it into a ‘campaign machine’ (Fitzherbert 2004: 68). Its members were already experienced in electoral campaigns, and on election days turned out at polling booths across the state to canvass votes. QWEL funded a campaign manager for Longman, a role taken by Susie Stewart Christesen, the editor of the League’s newsletter and an occasional contributor of stories and articles to the local press.
Miss Ogg was an indefatigable organiser, but her role in QWEL is only part of the story of Longman’s success. Arguably more important was her initiative in establishing a Brisbane branch of the London Lyceum Club, a club for professional women that was part of a national and international network. Margaret and her sister Wilhelmina (known as ‘Bill’) were members of the London club. There were already branches elsewhere in Australia, including the Karrakatta Club in Perth, where Edith Cowan and Bessie Rischbieth were members, and in Melbourne, where Vida Goldstein was a member. The Brisbane club was established in 1919, with Margaret Ogg as president. Other founding members included Lilian Cooper and Josephine Bedford. Most of these women are not so well known as earlier champions of female suffrage and women’s rights in Queensland Emma Miller and Léontine Cooper, though Dr Cooper and her companion Miss Bedford have been celebrated as a same-sex couple in Clive Moore’s history, *Sunshine and rainbows: The development of gay and lesbian culture in Queensland* (2001).

Margaret Ogg, Susie Christesen, Josephine Bedford and Winifred Moore — all members of the Lyceum Club — were among the ‘congenial people’ who became Longman’s supporters. What set the Lyceum Club apart was its emphasis on ideas and the arts, and its connection to an international network, which encouraged the circulation of feminist ideas. Barbara Caine has noted the importance of the club as a setting for Vida Goldstein’s and Bessie Rischbieth’s engagement with British feminists during their visits to London: ‘if one were to look for direct links between the time in London and the later feminist interests of Australian women, one would focus more closely on the concerns about imperial and international questions that were articulated in the Lyceum Club and in the Australian and New Zealand Committee of Women Voters’ (Caine 2004: 24).

While Longman herself did not travel abroad, she was well informed about programs of social reform through her reading. After her election, she spoke on the topic of ‘women rebels’ (Mary Wollstonecraft, Florence Nightingale and Emmeline Pankhurst) to an exclusively male audience at the Constitutional Club in July 1929. Poignantly, Pankhurst died in 1928, the year that the parliamentary vote was finally accorded to all women in Britain. No doubt her audience recalled Pankhurst’s militancy and her impassioned speeches from the dock. But Longman signalled her own preoccupations by invoking the *Vindication of the rights of woman*, reminding her audience of Wollstonecraft’s argument that women’s rights included a right to be admitted to the professions, and economic independence for married women. And she restated Wollstonecraft’s claim that ‘women’s duty to themselves was to be rational beings and good citizens’ (*Brisbane Courier*, 5 July 1929, 16).

As a young woman, Longman had trained as a teacher at Maybanke College, where she was deeply influenced by the educational philosophy and political ideas of Maybanke Wolstenholme, later Maybanke Anderson. After her husband’s appointment to the Queensland Museum brought her to Brisbane, Longman pursued her interests in the welfare and education of children through the playground movement, where she worked closely with Josephine Bedford, and in women’s economic status as workers and mothers through the National Council of Women (NCW). It was in her capacity as President of the NCW that she gave evidence to the Royal Commission on Child Endowment (1927). Mrs Longman’s evidence was widely reported, and brought her to public attention. She argued for motherhood
endowment, but also for recognition of women’s equality as workers. Just like men, their work benefitted their families, not just themselves. As Marilyn Lake notes, her claims astounded the commissioners. She asserted that wives and mothers were entitled to payment from the state, and that the determination of wages claims should be based not on the ‘fiction’ of a male breadwinner, but on the equality of all workers. The implications of economic independence were not lost on the Commission: ‘Women could live apart from their husbands? That is an alteration of existing conditions? Yes, absolutely. It is revolutionary, and that is what we wish.’ (Lake 1999: 105)

Her role as President of the NCW provided invaluable training for politics. Writing in the Brisbane Courier, Winifred Moore paid tribute to Longman’s success in creating harmony among the more than fifty societies affiliated with the NCW. Moore called it ‘the Women’s Parliament’, calling up associations with the meeting place of the Women’s Social and Political Union in London. Electors could be confident that Longman would participate with good effect in parliamentary debate, Moore argued, as her experience had augmented her ‘natural gifts of clear thinking and plain speaking’ with ‘those qualities of tact and graciousness which are even more necessary in public than in private life’ (Brisbane Courier, 2 May 1929, 10).

Where QWEL, the NCW and the Playground Association provided Longman with opportunities to intervene in public policy and social reform, at the Lyceum Club the agenda was broader, and its activities included recitals, lectures and debates, reading circles and social gatherings. Many of its members were writers, musicians and artists. It provided hospitality for visitors from its sister clubs in Australia and abroad. In this context, women were able to ‘be themselves’, and to realise what that might mean, post-suffrage.

In Authors Week 1927, members of the Lyceum Club took part in a public discussion of Australian literature. Irene Longman presided as a large audience heard three papers from club members, including Winifred Moore, who spoke on ‘Some women writers’. Her subjects were Mrs Lance Rawson, who published naturalistic sketches in The Queenslander, Mary Gilmore and Nettie Palmer. The Brisbane Courier reported her comments on Palmer at some length. In Moore’s assessment, Palmer ‘combined the creative and critical faculty and, therefore, occupied a place of her own in Australian literature’. While acknowledging the ‘fine spirit’ and ‘true lyric quality’ of Palmer’s poems, Moore argued that her criticism would be Palmer’s greatest contribution to Australian culture. ‘The interpretative critic was always showing the work of art in some new relation to the age and in this way Nettie Palmer was performing a service which was as important as it was rare.’ (Brisbane Courier, 24 October 1927, 19)

Though Nettie Palmer was not a member of the club, she had friends among its members, and was often invited to events. In February 1929, as she and her family were about to return to Melbourne after having lived for some years in Caloundra, her Brisbane friends hosted a farewell tea. The guests included her sisters-in-law, Emily Bulcock and Mabel Palmer, and Winifred Moore and Irene Longman. It must have been a bittersweet occasion for Nettie, who had written in her journal a week before: ‘Find that with half of me I’m bitterly regretting our decision to go back to Melbourne . . . will we ever again find a place so rich in all that makes for happy living.’ (Palmer 1988: 40)
Mary Hunt (1991) has argued that friendship has provided a context for women to understand and practise the civil values of mutuality, equality and reciprocity. She distinguishes these voluntary relationships from familial relationships, where inequality and injustice may be concealed from public view. Hunt concludes that friendship is the foundation of women’s actions to secure social good. The sociologist Jeffrey Alexander (2001) makes a similar point about the women’s movement in the United States. Though ‘first-wave’ feminists claimed a moral authority on the basis of their private virtue, he characterises their reform agenda as a program to secure the civil repair of intimate injustice. Irene Longman’s network of friends was connected by their club memberships, and by a concern to promote social good and to address intimate injustice.

Margaret Ogg was a journalist and edited the women’s section of the New South Wales country newspaper, the *United Grazier*, using the pseudonym Ann Dante. Longman wrote an introduction to her unpublished memoir of growing up in Brisbane as one of ten children of a Presbyterian minister (Longman’s father was also a minister). This project was encouraged by Ernest Briggs, a radio announcer who lived with Margaret and her sister Bill for many years. Margaret was an accomplished musician, and this was the basis of the bond with Briggs, who wrote a play about her career as a suffragette, ‘The old battle-axe’, as well as recording his recollections of life with the sisters (these manuscripts survive in the John Oxley library). Bill was a free spirit, adopting the mannish style of the advanced woman and defiantly smoking and drinking. She was frequently absent, travelling abroad, but the sisters’ relationship, though strained at times, was always affectionate. Margaret remained ‘a daughter of the manse’, always conscious of a duty to aid the afflicted and the lonely. She was a member of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, and founded the Mission to Seamen in Brisbane. Her involvement with QWEL spanned thirty years, and was not confined to meetings in the city. Travelling in a sulky with her assistant, Mrs Anderson, she visited many towns in country Queensland, urging women to exercise their right to vote. In her memoir, she recalls the hostility she encountered in some towns: on one occasion, her luggage was stolen from her hotel room and she was often refused admission to public venues. Hecklers retreated when their abuse was met with her cutting wit. She bore her nickname, ‘the old battle-axe’, with pride. When Longman entered parliament, she was able to secure passage of legislation to secure the rights of widows to a share of their husband’s estate, and to push for reform of divorce laws — two causes close to Miss Ogg’s heart. After her death, Margaret Ogg’s legacy to Queensland women was a fund to support women political candidates.

Josephine Bedford (1861–1955) arrived in Brisbane from the United Kingdom in 1891 with Lilian Cooper, the first woman to practise medicine in Queensland. Bedford had attended art school, and was interested in city planning and the Garden City movement. She became active in the Playground Movement, the Creche and Kindergarten Association and the NCW. Longman, whose marriage ended her teaching career, had found a new outlet by writing (as ‘Aunt Tabitha’) a column for children in the Toowoomba *Citizen* (Ferres 2012: 49). After moving to Brisbane, she secured temporary work (married women were not eligible for continuing employment) for the Playground Association. She helped Bedford to establish a playground.
The Lyceum Club and the Modern Woman

and library in Spring Hill that was named for Bedford and still stands. Through their work and their friendship, the two women shared ideas about the importance of children’s education through play. Bedford and Longman presented papers on these topics to the NCW in June 1913 (Ferres 2012: 50). Bedford’s networks were extensive. During the Great War, Bedford and Cooper (like Miles Franklin) joined the medical corps in Macedonia: Cooper as doctor, Bedford as ambulance driver. They travelled together and created links with women’s organisations in United States and Europe as well as nationally. During a visit to the United States, they studied parks and playgrounds designed for children, and met with planners in Chicago and other cities.

Margaret Ogg’s interest in music was shared by Winifred Moore, who was raised by her sister in North Queensland and later became a music teacher. Like Lilian Cooper and Josephine Bedford, Moore had been born in England. At the Lyceum Club, Moore often took part in the productions of the drama circle. She came to prominence, however, as a journalist. She took a job as a reporter at the *Daily Mail* during the war, and later became editor of the social pages of the *Brisbane Courier* at the time of Longman’s campaigns. She had formally retired (though she continued to write a column) just days before her death in 1952. Moore incorporated political commentary into the women’s pages. As ‘Verity’, she wrote a column called ‘Between ourselves’ that included observations about social issues. As time went on, her interests in women’s issues were more overtly signalled by the title of her columns. The gossipy ‘Between Ourselves’ gave way to ‘The Woman’s World’, and eventually ‘Speaking for Women’. In the 1920s, however, the weekly women’s section of the *Brisbane Courier* was titled ‘For the Home Circle’. Its contents included gossip, fashion and recipes as well as social news and features on prominent people. In ‘The passing parade’, a regular feature, Moore offered observations on social life, books and authors.

Her ‘Speaking for Women’ columns regularly featured accounts of bushwalking and the beauty of local national parks at Mt Glorious and the Lamington Plateau. This was a pleasure she shared with Margaret Ogg, who wrote poems about the bush, and with friends in Caloundra and at Mt Tamborine. But it was also clearly a pleasure shared by many women, as they joined the National Parks Association, the Queensland Naturalists’ Club and the Bush-Walkers in greater numbers than men did, because these clubs made the bush more accessible to them (*Courier-Mail*, 5 April 1950, 10). In March 1934, Moore devoted two columns to an account of annual holiday at Mt Buffalo in Victoria, a happy time — ‘happiest of all in my companion, sharer of many previous holiday jaunts’ (*Courier Mail*, 8 March, 16). They interrupted their train journey in Sydney, where they stood in ‘contemplation of the grave beauty’ of the public sculpture and the fountain in Hyde Park, before continuing to their destination. Though her friend is not named, it is tempting to think that it might have been the sculptor Daphne Mayo, who was also a member of the Lyceum Club. While they were in Victoria, they also spent time in Melbourne and visited Emerald, where the Palmers lived, to have tea at Emerald Lake. Moore’s connections with the Palmers and her interest in conservation are captured in a tribute written by Emily Bulcock after Moore’s death:

She shared the Cup of Life with Countless women
Knew all their secret fears
Kay Ferres

Their trivial surface needs, their strange deep longings
Their laughter and their tears
Her House of Life, with all its doors wide open
Stood gallant down the years

... ‘Best trust the happy hours’, she told us gaily;
Dear Friend, her happiest hours
Were spent in her beloved Bush among the wildlings
Seeking Spring’s earliest flowers
In what wild fields, to-day, gleams that free spirit
Rich in its new found powers (Courier-Mail, 14 November 1952, 6)

Modern Women

In January 1929, an article appeared in ‘For the home circle’, apparently prompted by the hard-won success of the campaign for women’s suffrage in Britain in the final months of 1928. The author, identified only by her initials, was Nettie Palmer. She posed a provocative question: Has the ‘advanced woman’ disappeared? She recalls the ‘cheap’ mockery of suffragettes but offers a different impression:

They were unlike other women in either ignoring ‘days-at-home’, their own or other people’s. They were earnest, and actually preferred meetings, drawing room or more public. They rode bicycles, some of them with market-bundles on the handle-bars. They were rather anxious to ignore what ‘people might say’. Their clothes were sometimes ‘mannish’, not in the coquetish way that the pretty girl of to-day wears a waist-coat or a tail-coat, but in a middle-aged, no-nonsense style. They wished to share man’s privileges in public life, and were willing to dispense with some of women’s privileges in private. Their aim was to dress as unnoticeably and unattractively as men. It can only be said that they were sometimes over-successful, and it was in such cases that the caricaturists had their dreadful say. But most of the advanced women whom I can at all remember were pretty, and wore ruffles, and had gentle serious voices. They took out their advancement in reading whatever books they pleased, and in ignoring Mrs Grundy. (3 January 1929, 16)

Though the vote had been won and many reforms achieved, Palmer notes the disappearance of the term ‘advanced woman’, and ponders what this means for the status of women. The ‘shop-girl of 1928’ might appear to be the embodiment of all the hopes of the advanced women who secured her emancipation, but to Palmer she was a disappointment. Her liberty is merely fashion; she does not know that she is free. Palmer appealed for the word ‘advanced’ to come back into circulation, and with it ‘forward-looking thoughts’, eagerness and experimentation.

In May 1929, the electors of Bulimba returned an ‘advanced woman’ to the Queensland Legislative Assembly. Irene Longman’s modern dress and pleasing voice, her advocacy for women and children, her interest in books and ideas, her earnestness and her later proud ownership of a motor car qualify her as ‘advanced’, according to Palmer’s description. The friends who shared her club habit supported her in her campaign. Susie Christensen helped her to doorknock constituents in Bulimba. Other women lent their cars and then helped at polling booths. When she won, they were jubilant: ‘We are still talking about the Elections, and it is likely to remain the absorbing topic of conversation for some time, or, at any rate, until we
have become less excited over the joyful result.’ (Figaro, 25 May 1929, 14). Writing about Longman’s victory in The Land, Susie Christesen voiced the hopes of her supporters: ‘One of the most significant and important phases of this movement among women is that it tends to bring all classes of women closer together and to break down class prejudices, and by this means it becomes a feeder for upward moving democracy.’ (7 June 1929, 17)

During that first campaign, the press and public opinion were on Longman’s side, but by the time she sought re-election things had changed. But during her term in parliament, Longman’s support of feminist ideas about women’s economic independence, her efforts to secure their legal equality in marriage and her arguments against censorship created the ‘sex antagonism’ that she abhorred. When a redistribution of electoral boundaries made her seat unwinnable, her own party had little interest in saving her career. Then she was subjected to vociferous opposition and vicious personal attack, and her party was deeply unpopular. Cartoonists depicted her as limp and weak, powerless to fight back against a strong opposition. Opponents drowned out her speeches at public meetings. She was denigrated as heartless and uncaring, and as a childless woman who worked despite having a husband to support her.

After her defeat, she founded the Queensland Citizenship League (QCL) with Margaret Ogg and Lilian Cooper. The League’s motto was ‘Loyalty to Women’. This move provoked a bitter attack in The Worker. ‘Wordy’ Mrs Longman was denounced as a Tory and her organisation deemed ‘feminist’:

Feminism is in itself a thing of mischievous practice ... Obstinate feminism nowhere has achieved big results. It did not anywhere get women the franchise, a right which became theirs by the consent of parliaments in which the leaven of intelligent democracy had become strongly imbued with democracy’s inherent respect for good women. (28 June 1933, 18)

It was decades before another woman was elected to the Queensland parliament, and so Palmer’s pessimism was well founded: the vote was merely the vote.

Are there no more advanced people in the world? Or can it be said that everybody is advanced, so that there is no more to be said about it? Perhaps it is like the advance in speed by the motor over the jinker: everyone on a good road and in a good car goes smoothly his 25 miles an hour and hardly seems to be moving at all. No need to speak of speed, then! In the same way, perhaps, now that everyone has taken one step forward, the rows of drilled humanity look as even as ever.

Like Nettie Palmer, Maybanke Anderson thought that it was ‘easy to exaggerate the power of the vote’ (Magarey 2001: 173). Without it, women were confirmed in their inferiority to men, but once it was granted, women in Australia learned to take their part in politics. As Anderson saw it, ‘in the politics of a democracy there should be no sex’ (2001: 172); women could bring as much intelligent energy as men to the exercise of citizenship, and should enjoy the full citizenship of the independent worker. This was the spirit that Longman’s friends and associates brought to her campaign and that she sought to reanimate through the QCL.

To conclude, I want to return to the importance of the Lyceum Club in the making of the modern woman. In modernity, individuals increasingly unmoored from traditional forms of association had to find a place in new roles and rela-
tionships and to create new social ties. Expanded citizenship, and new legal and economic statuses transformed women’s lives in modernity. Instead of being contained within the enclosed and hierarchical networks that reinforced traditional familial roles, women looked outward to form new affiliations. Through work and social life, and their adoption of the ‘club habit’, women found friendship and explored and extended their new-found powers in the period after their enfranchisement and after the disruption of the Great War. The Lyceum Club and other women’s organisations provided a space and a program where they could negotiate their new identities in changing social structures, and reframe their understandings of women’s legal, political and economic status. They could connect with ideas, and with women elsewhere. This positioned professional women, and married women who sought to achieve independent economic and legal status, in the centre of contention about the emerging social order.

Longman’s small victories — the appointment of women police, the establishment of a children’s court and better legal treatment for widowed, separated and divorced women — have had lasting effects on the social order. These changes, so hard won, are now taken for granted, like the motor cars that Palmer speaks of. But Longman and her associates are largely forgotten. As Olive Schreiner recognised, in Women and Labour (1911), this was the fate of reformers:

I should like to say to the men and the women of the generations which will come after us — ‘You will look back at us with astonishment! You will wonder at the passionate struggles that accomplished so little; at the, to you, obvious paths to attain our ends which we did not take; at the intolerable evils before which it will seem to you that we sat down passive; at the great truths staring us in the face, which we failed to see; at the truths we grasped at, but could never quite get our fingers around. You will marvel at the labour that ended in so little; — but what you will never know is how it was thinking of you and for you that we struggled as we did and accomplished the little which we have done; that it was in the thought of your larger realisation and fuller life, that we found consolation for the futilities of our own.

What I aspired to be, and was not, comforts me. (Schreiner 1978: 29–30)

References


