

From the Archives

With the opening of the Middle School Building to take place on April 1 it is perhaps appropriate to go back a few decades to the late 1960's and write about **Project Phoenix**. This Project was instigated in 1968 by the Trustees and the then Headmaster, Len Daniels, in an effort to raise sufficient funds to allow for the building of new facilities and the refurbishment of boarding facilities and classrooms.

The School population was growing rapidly at that time and the facilities were unable to cope. In fact, between 1968 and 1970 the School population increased by forty-two percent. Maurie Blank, Headmaster from 1948 to 1965, had worked very hard to improve the buildings and grounds but was always hampered by the lack of funds. The War Memorial Building Fund, re-instigated in 1961 to fund the building of the pool, was a big success and led the Trustees to believe that the time was ripe for a major fund raising venture.

Project Phoenix was launched at a gala dinner on August 9, 1968. At the dinner the then Chairman of the School Trustees, Ian Roberts, outlined the details of Project Phoenix. Stage One of the fund was to raise \$75,000 over five years and the monies raised would, in conjunction with Commonwealth and State Grants, be used to build a new Science-Classroom Block [estimated at \$120,000], build a new Administration, Library and Language Room [estimated at \$50,000] and to renovate existing School buildings [estimated at \$10,000].

Once the above projects were completed Stages Two and Three would be introduced accompanied by further fund raising appeals. Stage Two would include a Gymnasium-Assembly Hall, increased Boarder Accommodation, a Manual Arts' Centre and the development of an Outward Bound School. Stage Three would be the development of the Ovals and the Grounds, the establishment of a Junior School and the overall refurbishment of all buildings to provide completely modern facilities. It is interesting to note that Stages Two and Three were never developed during Len Daniels' Headmastership and it was left to later Headmasters/Principals to bring the vision to fruition. Of the above ideas the Outward Bound facility is the only project not as yet followed through.

Project Phoenix was an immediate success. The Appeal Executive Committee set up a structure manned by past students and parents. All known Past Grammarians were contacted as were Past Parents. Appeal Dinners were held in country towns and Townsville businesses were asked for donations. Within three months the Appeal had raised \$61,700, not far short of the \$75,000 required over five years. A final analysis of donors is interesting to note. While Past Grammarians were the biggest group of donors it was the Present Parents who gave the most money. Past Parents were also generous in their gifts. Of the Past Grammarians who donated to the Project many were from rural areas.

The success meant that the Trustees could implement some of their plans immediately. The first project was the building of a Science Block complete with a Girls' Common Room, toilet facilities and some classrooms. When the building went out to tender the accepted quote was \$192,712.00 a figure well over the initial cost of \$120,000. Fortunately, the then Minister for Education, Malcolm Fraser, upped the Commonwealth Grant from \$60,000 to \$87,700 and the Trustees were able to proceed with the building. This building was opened by Dr P. Delamouth M.L.A. on October 2, 1971. It was re-furbished in 1999 from monies donated by a Past Grammarian and re-named the R.P. Rheuben Science Building in recognition of his generosity. Dr Rheuben had been a student from 1911-1915.

Inspired by the success of the new Science Block the Trustees went ahead with the building of the Library [estimated cost of \$50,227]. Helped by further financial grants from the Commonwealth and the State Governments and a debenture loan the P.F. Rowland Memorial Library was opened on June 3, 1972. It was due to be opened in January of that year but damages caused by *Cyclone Althea* led to the postponement of the opening. The School was exceptionally fortunate to escape severe damage during the Cyclone and the \$40,000 damage bill was paid by the School Insurance. Memories of *Cyclone Leonta* were still vivid as it had taken the School close to forty years to pay off the damage caused by that Cyclone.

The initial stage of Project Phoenix was an undoubted success. At the start of 1974 School numbers increased to 471 students leading to a burgeoning interest in students wishing to take manual arts' subjects. The Trustees and Len Daniels set plans in motion to accommodate this increase but were unable to raise, in spite of a Building Levy being suggested, sufficient funds to undertake all but a modified version of a Manual Arts' Centre. Numbers dropped dramatically at the start of 1975 and even the modified version was put on hold until a few years later.

There is no doubting that Project Phoenix was an ambitious one. Its vision was broad and far sighted. While Len Daniels was only able to implement Stage One of the Project the genesis of the overall plan had been put in place and set the pattern for future growth at the School. In some respects the new Middle School building is the first major addition at Grammar that was not planned for in Project Phoenix.

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