

## FROM THE ARCHIVES

For schools that have a long history there is bound to be a year or years that could be regarded as difficult. Townsville Grammar is no exception to the rule and there have undoubtedly been times when the School has undergone a difficult period. These difficulties are often a result of external factors. Perhaps, the two most difficult times suffered by our School occurred in 1903 (Cyclone Leonta) and 1942-44 (World War Two). The purpose of this archival report is to make the readers aware of what occurred in 1942, a year the then Headmaster, **T.B. WHIGHT** regarded as a horror year and yet a year that displayed the wonderful resilience and character that remains a continuous feature of our School ethos.

School numbers at the start of 1941 were one hundred and forty but dropped to one hundred and twenty towards the end of the year. Due to the war, people were leaving Townsville and moving south. Then in December 1941 Japan entered the conflict and this had a dramatic effect on the School. The Queensland Government closed all schools in the district and students had to either move south or inland towards Charters Towers. The Trustees immediately cancelled all new enrolments and no local enquiries were encouraged. However, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of March 1942 the Government rescinded their closing of all schools and allowed schools to re-open. This, however, did not help Grammar because the School had been taken over by the RAAF in January 1942.

It is a testament to the energy and dedication of T.B. Whight, his staff and the Trustees that the School re-opened on March 10 in a house in the suburb of Rosslea. The house, belonging to a Mr McInness, was ideal as it was close to the river and had a park situated across the road. Thirty-one students attended that first day and the number had grown to sixty-two by the middle of the year. At this stage there were seventeen boarders so another house close-by was rented. This house served as a dining room for students and as a staff residence. It was obvious that a friendly and co-operative atmosphere prevailed in the new surroundings. As T.B. Whight wrote in his Speech Night Report of 1942 the students had come to a place not hallowed by age or imbued with tradition but to a home masquerading as a school. They rose to the challenge with the common aim of keeping the School Flag flying.

The move to the Rosslea campus certainly had an influence on the academic progress of the students. It took some time for a Chemistry and Physics Laboratory to be set up but of more concern was the difficulty in finding suitable teachers. Many of the male staff, including G.H. Owen (to the AIF) and M.W. Blank (to the RAAF) enlisted during the year leaving a void difficult to fill. Blank and Owen were the Physics and Chemistry teachers and it was left to Mr Whight to teach both these subjects, including Mathematics, to the senior school students. It is interesting to note that Owen and Blank both returned as staff members in 1946, Owen having spent two horrendous years as a Japanese prisoner of war working on the Burma Railway. Mrs Shirley Shaw (nee Wall 1943) tells me that she was taught by a senior girl in all her commercial subjects. Yet in spite of these handicaps the School continued to achieve good results at the external examinations. In fact, Shirley Richards (1946) topped the State in the 1944 Junior Examinations and won the Byrnes Memorial Medal. William Watson (1942) rose to be a General in the Australian Army and Head of Medical facilities while Geoff Woolrych (1943) attained the rank of Vice-Admiral.

Sport was almost non-existent in 1942. Facilities were limited particularly when the AIF claimed the Park across the road. The Sports' Reserve was difficult to access so there was very little Cricket or Football played during the year. Tennis and Netball continued to be played. Interhouse competition also continued but often in a different form. While Athletics continued, Interhouse gardening became rather competitive with Hodges House winning in 1942. T.B. Whight mentions in his Speech Night Report that spinach flourished in the gardens but never made its way to the kitchen!!!!

Due to the shortage of domestic staff and a grounds-man most of the domestic chores were undertaken by the students. Every Friday the girls spent time mending the boys' clothing and socks while the boys cleaned the dormitories and classrooms as well as chopping wood for the kitchen and the laundry. The boarders were rewarded each Saturday morning with a special tea.

In addition to all the above the School also had to face the dangers of war. In a letter to his friend "Pat" Mr Whight writes that at 12.10 a.m. on July 27 the air raid sirens woke all the boarders. They dressed and went to their designated areas and then watched as a bombing raid took place over the Strand. A lone bomber flew close to the Rossvale campus and dropped a bomb at 12.40 a.m. The bomb which landed on the other side of the river, but close to the school, had enough force to cause some damage to a lamp shade in the main school building. Mr Whight was later to write, tongue in cheek, that Townsville Grammar could legitimately state that they were the only educational institution on the East Coast of Australia to have **suffered war damage**.

It could almost be argued that the bombing raid was a watershed for the School's progress in 1942. For the rest of the year numbers stabilized and by 1943 the School was once again ready to expand. The years 1943-44 were in fact better years for our School. This all came to an end when the students returned to the present campus at the beginning of 1945 only to find the campus run down and in need of much hard work. It was, in fact, too much for Mr Whight who after the difficult war years did not have the energy to continue so he resigned and moved south to the Sydney Church of England Grammar School (Shore) where he became Sportsmaster, a position he held until his retirement in 1965.

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