

From the Archives

In the last edition of the Principal's Newsletter I wrote about four Past Grammarians who had received knighthoods for their service to the nation. In this edition I would like to write about a past student who through sheer determination and his love of the English language became a prominent poet, author, war correspondent and ultimately editor of The Sydney Morning Herald.

Colin William Hugh BINGHAM [1913-1916] was born in 1898 and spent his early years in isolation at Maxwellton, a small town on the rail link from Townsville to Cloncurry. One of eleven children he could only afford to come to Grammar after winning a scholarship. Bingham thrived under the teaching of P.F. Rowland and it was here that he gained his love of literature, particularly Shakespeare, and poetry. He was to remain friends for life with Rowland and wrote a moving obituary on the death of his old Headmaster.

Bingham's mother was keen for him to become an articled clerk in an accounting firm when he completed his Junior Certificate but he persuaded her to allow him to do Senior. In his biography *The Beckoning Horizon* he writes that he wanted to be part of a wider world. "I want to be able to use words, not figures. I want to write." In his biography Bingham devotes an entire chapter to his life at the Grammar School. He was critical about his time as a boarder and, in particular, the bullying of new students at the School. On leaving Grammar he enlisted in the AIF but was discharged, due to ill-health, before he could serve overseas.

Bingham began his newspaper career as a proof-reader on the Townsville Bulletin before transferring to the Brisbane Telegraph where he became the literary editor and reviewed theatre and music. He was sent to London at the outbreak of World War Two and remained there until 1948. His wartime reporting concentrated on political developments in Europe and North Africa and he also attended the vital summit conferences at Cairo and Potsdam. On his return to Australia he worked for the Sydney Morning Herald as a book reviewer and commentator on foreign affairs. He also undertook special reporting missions to Europe where he concentrated on political developments.

He was appointed associate editor of the Herald in 1957 and was appointed editor in 1962. Bingham took great pride during his term as editor in expanding two key areas of that newspaper, the literary pages and Letters to the Editor. He also took keen interest in the political landscape of that time and often wrote biting comments on the then Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies. Menzies, in turn, often attacked the Herald in parliament.

Throughout his life Bingham maintained his keen interest in a wide range of literature. On his retirement he wrote three books which were termed dictionaries of quotations. These works are *Men and Affairs*, *The Affairs of Women*, and *Wit and Wisdom*. Bingham also wrote poetry all his life and published two books of verse: *Decline of Innocence* and *National Images*. A reading of School magazines from 1913 to 1916 also reflects his great love of poetry and literature. The magazines contain many of his earlier essays and poems. The following is a poem he wrote in his last year at Grammar [1916].

PRO PATRIA

 Their names are writ in gold, and for all time
 Will serve to gild the annals of the School;
Sons worthy of their own dear Northern clime,
Strong each and all with courage firm and cool.

 The words "Play up, play up, and play the game,"
 Were taught and heeded in this very room;
 These words set all their patriot hearts aflame,
 When war upon the world had cast its gloom.

 They played the game, and we are proud of it,
And when soft Peace shall hold once more its sway,
 We'll tilt our hat to those who "did their bit",
 And gave their lives in lands so far away.

Archivist's note: In writing this poem Bingham was undoubtedly influenced by P.F. Rowland. Rowland had written a School song prior to World War One called *Play the Game*. In this song Rowland used the analogy of sport to exhort the pupils to a greater sense of duty to the nation.

In the second stanza the room that Bingham refers to is the bottom floor of School House. At that time all the classrooms were located on that floor. The top floor was for boarding.

Mr W.J. Muller
School Archivist