

## FROM THE ARCHIVES

With the School holding its Speech Night on Wednesday, 12 November it is a good opportunity to write about the Speech Day held a century ago on December 11, 1908. The event took place in the morning and was held on the lawn in front of the Headmaster's house. At that time the house occupied the ground where the Middle School now stands. It was a magnificent old Queenslander with high set, wide verandahs and a sweeping and majestic staircase leading up to the verandah. The Headmaster, P.F. Rowland, and invited guests sat on the verandah while parents and friends were seated on the lawn below. There was no modern equipment such as microphones at that time so the voices of the speakers had to be strong and able to carry.

The programme on that day opened with the choir singing three School songs followed by the Chairman's address and the Headmaster's address. Students performed a variety of excerpts from the classics: the first was from Hamlet (in English), then Cicero (in Latin), then scenes from Aristophanes' "Birds" (in Greek) and finally a scene from Moliere's "Les Deux Sœurs" (in French). The extracts were interspersed by performances from the choir. Prizes were then distributed by the Chairman of Trustees and the day concluded with the singing of *Carmen Townsvillare*. It is interesting to note that on that day seventeen prizes were awarded, with an emphasis on prizes in Mathematics.

In many respects Speech Day was the most important day in the School year. It was an opportunity to put on display the talents of the students but further more it was in recognition of what the School had achieved over the academic year. As there were no Newsletters and other forms of communication it was the only opportunity for the Headmaster to set out his philosophies and to report on the running of the School. As a consequence the Headmaster's speech was often long and contained a balance of educational philosophy, plans for the School and a report on the sporting, cultural and academic progress of the students. In this respect it was not very different as to what occurs in present times with the exception that the current Principal's speech tends to be much shorter given the provision of a printed Annual Report.

In 1908 Mr Rowland was proud to announce that School numbers had reached seventy-one, a record, and that boarder numbers were thirty-one, also a record. He went on to say that as there was room only for twenty-seven boarders in Big School so thought would have to be given to extending the boarding facilities. He was also keen on building a new sanatorium because the current one was situated in his home and, with numbers increasing, it became difficult to cope at times. Mr Rowland was also proud to announce that all ten candidates for the University of Sydney Junior Examinations had passed, a feat not achieved by many schools. What pleased him most was that it was the School's policy that anyone who wanted to sit the examination would be allowed to do so, even though some candidates would have a small chance of success. In Mr Rowland's words: *"We believe that the best result of such an examination as the Junior is not the pass or the piece of parchment recording it, but the systematic work which it demands."*

The two major issues developed by Mr Rowland on Speech Day were firstly, the importance of mathematics as a subject and secondly, the future of secondary education in Queensland. In his 1907 report Mr Rowland had espoused the value of Latin as a subject so in 1908 he set out to develop the importance of mathematics in the School curriculum. Of major concern to Mr Rowland was the fact that too many parents believed that arithmetic was the only facet of mathematics of any value to their child. Mr Rowland argued that in a world where flying machines were being designed, road and bridge building becoming more sophisticated and other aspects of engineering being developed it was imperative that geometry, algebra and mechanics become a part of all student's mathematical knowledge. The underlying concern for Mr Rowland was the fact that he believed too many parents were happy to see their child graduate into the world of commerce, banking and insurance and he believed that students should widen their horizons.

The second issue that Mr Rowland developed was his concern at the hostile attitude adopted by the Department for Public instruction towards secondary education in Queensland. In his report Mr Rowland stated that he had initiated a conference of the Heads of the Grammar Schools which had taken place at Brisbane Grammar School. Chaired by the then Minister of Education, Mr Roe, decisions were made to not only recognize the independence of the Grammar Schools but also to set up a structure that would foster the growth of secondary education in Queensland. Mr Rowland reported that he had been invited to give the keynote speech at a Science Conference in Brisbane and it was at this Conference that he further outlined his ideas for the advancement of secondary education in Queensland.

In his Report Mr Rowland also gave a summary of sporting activities undertaken by the School during the year. His main concern was that there were few opportunities for Interschool sport so he announced that he was working on plan to play Rockhampton Grammar in a variety of sports on an annual basis. This would involve the School teams to sail to Rockhampton every second year in order to take part in competitive fixtures. Mr Rowland said that he had seen this type of programme work when he had taught at Christchurch Boys High School in New Zealand. Each year Nelson College would sail from Nelson to Christchurch to play that school at Rugby Union. (It is interesting to note that Nelson College was the first school in New Zealand to play Rugby Union).

Mr Rowland concluded his report by stating that during the year the Trustees had restored and repainted the Dining Hall and the Headmaster's House; incandescent lamps were installed in the classrooms; a typewriter was purchased for the commercial classes; the gymnasium was rebuilt; and an extra Master had been employed to take charge of the lower school. In many respects it had been a good year for the School.

The day concluded with a fun sports afternoon followed by afternoon tea.

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*School Archivist*