

PRO PATRIA HONOUR BOARDS

In 1899, six past students of the School volunteered to serve with the Queensland forces during the Boer War [1899-1902]. Since that time past students [male and female] have served Australia with distinction in every major conflict across the globe including Police and United Nations' actions in countries such as Cyprus, India-Pakistan and East Timor. Fifty-nine past students have lost their lives in these conflicts while hundreds more have served with distinction. Their involvement is proudly recognized by the Honour Boards to be found in the Maurie Blank Administration Building, the War Memorial Gates and the Memorial to those killed to be found in the School Quadrangle.

Perhaps the most iconic of the Honour Boards is the **Pro Patria** board in the foyer of the Senior School. Under the inspiration of the Headmaster, Mr P.F. Rowland, the Trustees agreed at the beginning of 1917 to erect an Honour Board recognizing past students who had enlisted to serve in World War One. The unveiling of the Board took place at 11.30 a.m. on Monday, 28 May 1917 and was attended by the then Governor of Queensland and Lady Goold Adams. Also in attendance were J.N. Parkes, a former Mayor of Townsville and Chairman of the Trustees, and Mr T. Foley MLA, father of the School's first girl student. In the audience were many parents whose sons had enlisted in the conflict. It must have been a poignant moment for Messrs T. Lowth, T. Tuffley and F. Johnson, whose sons were all killed during the war.

In a short speech before unveiling the Honour Board the Governor said that it was not a day for rejoicing for many of those names that were recorded on the Honour Board had died on the field of battle. He added that he thought that the Townsville Grammar was only doing its duty in erecting a memorial to those who had volunteered. If we did not do all to honour the brave we should be blamed by future generations. The Governor added that in addition to the erection of Honour Boards, schools and other public bodies ought to keep a record of the past history of those whom they commemorated. In future this would be a golden page in the history of Australia for the generations to come to peruse. The men whose names are on the Board, he said, have been among the Australian soldiers who have done great things for their country. They have made Australia a nation.

The Pro Patria Honour Board was initially placed on the wall of the Sixth Form Room on the bottom floor of School House. In 1917 the bottom floor was divided into two distinct classroom areas: Little School [Forms 111-IV] and Big School [Lower and Upper VI]. On the front wall of Little School was the Honour Board **Honoris Causa** which was unveiled in 1907 honouring students who had performed with academic distinction while students. This Honour Board is now also situated in the foyer of the Maurie Blank Building.

To mark the unveiling of Pro Patria, Colin Bingham [1913-1916] wrote a poem to celebrate the occasion. Bingham was later to become a prominent newspaper editor and a widely published author and poet. Naming his poem *Pro Patria*, Bingham wrote:

*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;
Those words set all their patriot hearts aflame,
When war upon the world has 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 lift our hats to those who 'did their bit',
And gave their lives in lands so far away.*

The wording in Verse Two is of particular interest. By referring to "this very room" Bingham writes about Big School where the Honour Board was situated. The words in line one relate back to the first School song *Play the Game* that P.F. Rowland wrote soon after becoming Headmaster. Every Friday afternoon time was set aside for singing and the song obviously became part of the session. In the last verse the students would sing:

*If at life, boys, you'd excel
Play the game.
Play life's hardship straight and well,
When the soft temptations come
Smite them hard and hit them home
Play the game!*

While other verses refer to cricket and football it is obvious that Mr Rowland was encouraging in the students a sense of patriotism and nationalism that would serve them well in times of stress. It is thus not surprising that a School with small annual enrolments prior to World War One should have one hundred and fifty-nine past student names recognized on **Pro Patria**.



Big School Room



Sixth Form Room

MR BILL MULLER
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