

## COLIN BINGHAM: POET, AUTHOR, JOURNALIST

The first annual Colin Bingham Writing Award winners have been announced at the Junior School. These awards were on the initiative of the Principal, Mr R.W. Fairley, and are to be seen in conjunction with the Rowland Writing Awards introduced some years ago into the Senior School. Colin Bingham, who enrolled in 1913, became a protégée of Mr Rowland and thus the introduction of the award a century on is seen as most appropriate.

Colin was born in 1898 at Twenty Mile Camp, a Cobb and Co staging post near Richmond. In 1907 Bingham's family moved to Maxwellton, a railway town close to Cloncurry. In his autobiography *The Beckoning Horizon* Colin writes that his early education was received from a 'staccato succession of governesses'. In spite of this disjointed education he wrote his first novel at age twelve. Written on brown paper and using a carpenter's pencil the novel was copied by his sister, Martha, and sent to a New York publisher. He never received a reply from the publisher.

Realising that their son was intelligent the family sent him and his brother, Percy, to Townsville where they spent their first year at Central State School. Colin Bingham was awarded the Robert Philp Scholarship to Grammar in 1913. After successfully completing his Junior Certificate in 1914, Bingham's mother wanted him to become a trainee in a local accountancy firm. By this stage, Colin was in love with literature and with encouragement from Mr Rowland, and a further scholarship, Mrs Bingham allowed Colin to complete his Senior Examinations. A prefect in 1915 and 1916 Colin, who won academic prizes for English and Geography, also played leading roles in various school plays including plays in French.

Soon after leaving Grammar Colin enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force but was discharged in September 1917 because of poor eyesight and a cardiac problem. He returned to Maxwellton to work with his father but spent much of his time writing for the *North Star* and small pieces for the *Bulletin*. In 1920 he decided to go to the University of Queensland where he entered St John's College. In his first year he won the inaugural Ford Memorial Medal for poetry and founded the College magazine, *Argo*. Unfortunately the lack of finance caused him to leave the university and seek employment.

Colin returned to Townsville where he was employed as a proof-reader on the *Daily Bulletin*. In 1922 he submitted an article on the League of Nations and thus began his career as a journalist. In 1923 he moved to Brisbane to undertake a course in journalism and to work on the *Telegraph*. At the *Telegraph* he wrote theatre and concert notes and under the pseudonym "Middlemarch" wrote a column which was a mixture of editorial comment and poetry. At the same time he completed a Diploma in Journalism, edited the university magazine *Galmahra*, won the Ford Medal in 1923 and 1924 and published two books on poetry.

In 1930 he was appointed editor of the *Telegraph's* literary pages and he also covered most fields of journalism with the exception of sport and politics. In 1940 Colin was seconded to the Australian Associated Press in London before returning to Australia in 1942 to work for the *Sydney Morning Herald*. In 1943 he returned to London as a war correspondent for that newspaper. His wartime reporting concentrated on political rather than military developments. Some of the issues he reported on included topics such as the Jewish-Arab problems in Palestine, the independence struggles in Lebanon and the Allied Leaders' Conference in Cairo in 1943. In July 1945 he covered the Potsdam Conference.

Colin returned to Australia as a leader-writer and foreign affairs commentator for the *Sydney Morning Herald*. He also edited the literary supplement of the paper and in 1961 he was appointed editor of that paper. As the editor he was able to balance his literary and diplomatic interests, and to inspire in journalists a broader appreciation of public affairs. As editor he often clashed with the then prime minister of Australia, Robert Menzies. On his retirement in 1965 he wrote further books on poetry, two books on quotations and his autobiography.

In July 1916 the Honour Board *Pro Patria* was unveiled by the then governor of Queensland. The Board is now to be seen in the School foyer. In honour of the occasion Colin wrote his first published poem:

### 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:  
Whose words set all their patriot hearts aflame,  
When was 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 lift our hats to those who "did their bit"  
And gave their lives in lands so far away.



**Archival Note:** In verse 2, the room that Bingham refers to is the classroom on the bottom floor of School House where the Honour Board was first displayed.

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