

FROM THE ARCHIVES

P.F. ROWLAND

Percy Fritz Rowland was Headmaster of Townsville Grammar School from 1905 until his retirement in 1938. A schoolmaster of outstanding intellect he attended St Paul's School in London on a scholarship. At St Paul's he won prestigious prizes in the study of English Literature. An open scholarship winner to Oxford University he was awarded the Chancellor's English Essay Prize in 1894. Mr Rowland taught in Ireland, England and New Zealand before moving to Australia as the Second Master at Rockhampton Grammar. He also lectured for two years in Economics and History at Canterbury College, the University of New Zealand. In 1906 he was offered the position as Beit Professor of Colonial History at Oxford University, an offer he declined.

Instead of pursuing an academic career at one of the world's leading universities, Mr Rowland chose to stay in Tropical North Queensland and guide a fledgling Queensland Grammar School. This was not to be an easy task, not helped by the debt incurred by Cyclone Leonta in 1903, the effects of World War One and the Depression of the 1930s.

The Headmaster's house was on the School grounds and the boarders' dining room was attached to the house. As a consequence, all meals were prepared by the wife of the Headmaster with the help of a couple of maids. Mr Rowland was also in charge of boarding but he was helped by three resident teaching staff. He attended all meals and also catered for the needs of boarders who were unwell. The sick bay was also attached to his residence and for over two decades Mrs Rowland and then, Mr Rowland's daughter, fulfilled the role of Matron. Mr Rowland also took prep on two mornings a week. Due to the lack of electricity until the mid-1920s boarders' prep was held before breakfast. Sam McCluskey, a Boarder between 1927 and 1931, wrote that the younger boarders would dread Mr Rowland supervising prep. He would go out of his way to check their Latin and make life difficult for them. The younger boarders would often get their own back because they knew that Mr Rowland's weakness was mathematics and they would often concoct a difficult problem for him to solve.

The school week consisted of thirty-five lessons a week divided into seven periods a day. Mr Rowland taught thirty-four periods, his only free period was the last lesson on a Wednesday. A glance at Mr Rowland's personal time-table for 1929 shows that he taught Form V and VI Latin, Form V and VI English, Form V and VI French and on a Friday afternoon he supervised the Form V and VI Singing classes for the senior classes and finished the week with a Form III reading class. Mr Rowland's mark book for 1929 also shows that he had reasonably large classes especially at the Form III level where there were, at times, close to thirty in the class!

Mark book P.F. Rowland.
1929

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Monday	V Lat	V Lat	V Lat	V Lat	V Lat	V Lat	V Lat
Tu.	V Lat	VI Lat Pr.	V Lat	VI Lat	VI Lat	VI Lat	VI Lat
Wed	VI Lat	III Lat	V Lat	VI Lat	VI Lat	V Fr.	
Th.	VI Eng	V Lat Pr.	V Lat	V Eng	VI Lat	VI Lat	VI Fr.
Fri	V Eng (In)	V Lat	VI Lat	V Eng	VI Uns.	V Uns.	III Read

Mr Rowland had a great love for sport and insisted that all students undertake regular physical exercise. No student was allowed to be indoors after school had finished for the day. In summer, cricket was the main sport with the seniors playing in the local cricket competition while the boys were divided into four "Colour" teams, each team captained by a staff member. Mr Rowland led the "Reds" for many years and Rowland House still has the colour red. In winter the School played rugby league. School matches were on a Saturday and club fixtures were on a Sunday. It was said that Mr Rowland never missed a match and that he was probably the most vocal supporter of the School at all games.

On a Sunday, Mr Rowland would accompany Anglican boarders to St James Cathedral. Church was compulsory for all boarders during Mr Rowland's time as Headmaster. Mr Rowland's son, Philip, once remarked that church was a relaxing time for his father who would often doze off during the sermon. The Sunday evening meal was often a highlight for the boarders. After a good supper Mr Rowland would regale the boys with stories from the past or read them extracts from books or poetry. Sam McCluskey commented that these were often very happy occasions with great laughter and comradeship. Mr Rowland was a great proponent of English Literature yet, in a letter to the Editor of the Townsville Bulletin written on his retirement in 1938 he remarked that he had failed as a teacher. "My chief enthusiasm has been English Literature;" he wrote. "But I do not find that, during my long life in Townsville, I have succeeded in spreading my enthusiasm."

Mr Rowland's years are best summed up by a past student Colin Bingham [1913-1916], author, war correspondent and editor of the Sydney Morning Herald in the 1960s in his obituary of Mr Rowland: "His devotion to duty was obvious to every pupil. He taught the whole of English and Latin for 34 years, the senior French as well. From time to time he taught Greek to an occasional pupil, and it was nothing for him to begin his active teaching at 7 a.m., to work the normal school day and then at night, to teach some small boys from the west the rudiments of English. His pupils will remember him best for his sense of humour, his tolerance and his justice."

MR BILL MULLER
School Archivist