

## THE EFFECT OF THE TWO GREAT WARS

### 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 above is the first verse of a poem written by **Colin Bingham [1913-1916]** and commemorated the unveiling of the Pro Patria Honour Board that now graces the foyer of the Blank Administration Building. Colin Bingham went on to become a world renowned World War Two war correspondent and editor of The Sydney Morning Herald in the 1960s. He was also a prolific author and poet.

On ANZAC Day each year the School recognises the ultimate sacrifice fifty-nine past students have given for their nation as well as recognizing the hundreds of other past students who took part in conflicts starting with the Boer War 1899-1902 and continuing through to the recent conflicts in the Middle East and Afghanistan. The purpose of this *From the Archives* is to show what affect on the School the two Great Wars had and, in particular, the effect of World War Two.

Writing in the first ever School Magazine in June 1897 the editor, J.A. Castling a staff member and past student and also composer of the music for the School Song, wrote: *"One thing that is needed above all to keep the School going is Co-operation."* By this he included all members of the School community. The war was to change all that. Until 1914 the Old Boys' Association had its own social club in Sturt Street, a highly successful cricket team and also provided financial support to the School. From 1897 to 1914 there were always two School Magazines published each year. The war involved many of the past students with many of them leaving Townsville. Many were not to return. Mr Rowland, the Headmaster, also commented in his 1916 Speech Night Report on the affect the war was having on staffing. Mr Rowland had a policy of employing young graduates but this was no longer possible as many had enlisted in the war effort.

World War Two was to have a more dramatic affect on the School. In response to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour on 7 December, 1941, the Australian Government in January 1942 placed a total ban on the opening of coastal schools in North Queensland. Enrolments were cancelled and those students already at the School moved either to Charters Towers or to southern schools. The Trustees considered abandoning the School altogether but on 2 March, 1942 the Government rescinded their January decision and under the inspiring leadership and hard work of Tommy Whight, the then Headmaster, the School re-opened a few weeks later but on a different campus. On opening day at the Rosslea Campus thirty-one students turned up but by the start of second term there were fifty-six students.

On ANZAC Day 1942 Mr Whight wrote that the finances were in a parlous state and that there was not enough to pay salaries and accounts. This was largely due to the fact that the Army Hiring Department had reneged on a deal to take over the School. The RAAF had commandeered the North Ward Campus for the war effort and the Wing Commander in charge of Operations had promised to pay a four and half per cent rental on the capital value of the School. This was estimated to be worth £800 per annum. This, however, changed when an Army representative said they would pay no more than £3/17/- a week rental as well as removal costs from the main campus to the Rosslea Campus.

In spite of the dramatic move to the Rosslea Campus the School and the students thrived. Mr Whight remarked in one letter that it was a happy time with the students working together to overcome difficulties encountered through the war. The boarders cleaned the buildings, the girls helped with darning socks and laundry and there was an Interhouse competition to see who could grow the best vegetables. Although Mr Whight struggled to find suitable teaching staff, results achieved in that period were excellent with Shirley Richards and Bryan Emmerson both attaining 9As at Junior Level, the first time ever in the School's history.

The return to the Paxton Street campus for the start of the 1945 academic year brought enormous problems. In a letter to his friend written on 10 February, 1946 Mr Whight in summing up the previous year said that it was the most difficult period yet encountered in a long teaching career. While School House and the main classroom block [now the Maurie Blank Building] were in reasonable condition the rest of the School was in a mess. In Mr Whight's words *"The prep School had been badly eaten by white ants, the foundations are beyond repair and so is the floor. The dining room is depressing, the school kitchen appalling, the laundry shocking and the maids live in poor conditions."* To add to this the RAAF were only to remove the 60 feet by 20 feet living quarters on what is now the Alan Morwood Oval in June 1946 leaving behind concrete blocks and holes on the ground. As a consequence there was little space for the students to play sport. Rubbish in the form of timber and iron had also been left behind and it took staff and students some months to clear the surrounding areas.

School finances were also in a bad state. Mr Whight comments in the letter that he had £4,000 to cover the cost of re-painting some of the buildings, to purchase beds for the boarders, to re-furnish some of the classrooms and to fix the toilets and plumbing system that had been left in poor condition. Staff wages also increased and in his letter Mr Whight estimates that after all costs were met he had 17/- shillings a week left to feed each boarder. He also mentions that he had to take a cut in wages to meet the budget.

It is not surprising that Mr Whight resigned at the end of 1946 to return to Shore in Sydney. It brought to an end the wonderful association Mr Whight had with the School as student, teacher and Headmaster. In resigning he wrote *"... I have no regrets. The experience has been enjoyable and I think I have something to show for my efforts. I don't think I can be accused of squitting it."*

**MR BILL MULLER**  
School Archivist

