

SPEECH NIGHT IN 1911

A hundred years ago Speech Night was held on the lawns of the Headmaster's residence, the residence situated where the Middle School now stands.

Speech Day was a formal occasion with the Headmaster, Board members and invited guests all wearing three piece suits. The students were also formally dressed with the boys wearing suits and the girls having to wear hats and gloves. The students and parents were seated on the grass area around the house while the Headmaster and Board members were seated on the verandah of the residence. As there were no microphones at that time, the voices of the speakers would have to carry over a reasonable distance. It would also have been a hot and humid December day with no shade provided for the guests and the students.

Proceedings were opened by the Chairman, J.V. Barnett, who welcomed the guests and spoke briefly about the school year. In his remarks he commented on the fact that the School attracted students from as far south as Mackay, as far north as New Guinea and from areas west of Charters Towers. Mr Barnett introduced Mr Rowland, the Headmaster, who spoke at length on educational matters. In his speech Mr Rowland concentrated on four issues of educational interest to the School.

The main thrust of Mr Rowland's speech was that he was concerned that Queensland grammar schools would lose their democratic nature especially if what he termed "free schools" were introduced into the state. Mr Rowland believed that Queensland Grammar Schools were the most democratic in the world with no distinction between religions, social class and academic ability. All students received an absolute equality of treatment and, in his words, the *"only clear honour is purchase by the merit of the wearer."*

The second and third issues that Mr Rowland touched on concerned boarding and the teaching of languages. He was a great believer that all students should experience boarding at some time during their schooling but more contentiously, he argued for Latin as the major subject in all schools. While not against modern languages such as French and German he believed that students would benefit from learning Latin. This would even improve their study of English literature and other facets of English, particularly grammar.

The fourth and rather interesting issue Mr Rowland raised was the question of compulsory military training. In 1911 the Australian Labour Party government instituted a system of compulsory military training for all males between the ages of 12 and 26. All Grammar male students were expected to appear on a Saturday to undertake some form of military training. Mr Rowland stated that this had a marked effect on Saturday sport at the School, so with the help of the army major in charge this was changed to a Wednesday afternoon allowing weekend sport to continue. [It should be noted that this move by the ALP was extremely unpopular and by 1914 it was abandoned after 34000 people had been charged for avoiding the system].

In his speech Mr Rowland touched on two further issues. The first was the issue of health in the School. He was rather pleased that it had been a good year for health with only one broken leg and four mild cases of chicken pox to trouble the nurse. The second regarded the introduction of Junior Examinations by the University of Queensland in 1911. Prior to this date examinations were set by the University of Sydney and written in July. Due to the lateness of the Queensland examinations, changes had to be made to the School calendar.

At the completion of the speeches, academic and other awards were presented to the students. The Chelmsford Cup [Rugby Prize] was won by R.A Percy for the second occasion. He was also to win the award for a third time in 1912. Two interesting names appeared on the prize lists. One was R.P. Rheuben who was in later years to be a great benefactor to the School: the Science Block is named after him. The other was R. McKimmin who in the 1940s became a Trustee of the School and who donated a £1000 for the McKimmin Memorial situated in the Quadrangle. The Memorial commemorates the death of his son, Alan, while still a student at the School. A third name mentioned at the ceremony was W.H. Donald who in 1929 donated the Mary Agnes Donald Memorial Prize. This prize for the best all-round girl in the School is the highest award presented to a girl.

The audience at Speech Night 2011 were treated to an excellent display of singing and music by students at the School. In 1911 the choir performed two brackets. The first bracket consisted of songs in Latin and French while the second bracket consisted of Australian songs and included the School's 'Cadet Song.' There were also excerpts from Greek and Latin authors performed in these classical languages. This was followed by an excerpt from a French play written by Moliere and the entertainment was completed by a hilarious rendition of 'Bardell versus Pickwick' from The Pickwick Papers by Charles Dickens.

On the completion of the proceedings afternoon tea was served on the lawn and then the school year came to a close with all the students heading home with their parents. It was always a happy occasion as many of the boarders would not have seen their parents, due to the tyranny of distance, during the year.



Headmaster's Residence 1908

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