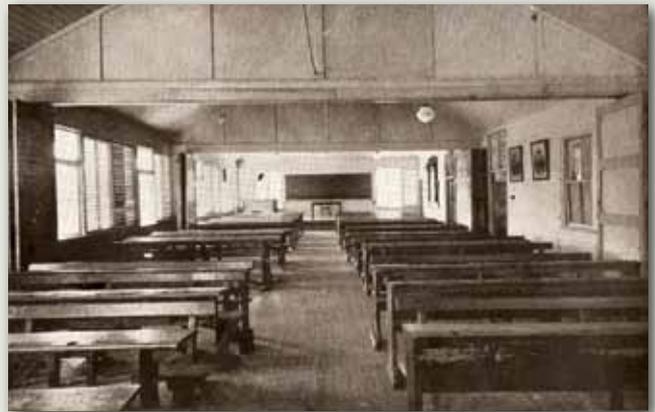


THE MAURIE BLANK BUILDING

The first building that prospective parents and students to the School enter is the Maurie Blank Administration Building. Situated on the corner of Burke and Paxton Streets the building celebrated its seventieth year in September of last year and is the second oldest building in the School. The building is named after Maurie Blank, a Master at the School from 1939-1942, 1945-1946 and Headmaster from May 1948 to December 1965.

In 1939 Tommy Whight was appointed Headmaster and he was faced by increasing enrolments and a lack of suitable classroom accommodation. To meet the shortage of classrooms the Trustees approached the West End State School which was closing down their kindergarten centre with the request that they donate that building to the Grammar School. The Department of Education agreed to this request and at Easter in 1940 work began on the building at Grammar. Before the building could begin the then caretaker, Mr Swynsen, had to pay 2/6 for a blasting licence so that he could use gelignite to clear some of the trees in the area. The Trustees decided to erect a two storey building, brick on the ground floor and the timber building from West End State School as the second floor. The total cost of the building was £3000, of which £1750 was borrowed. The sum of £800 came from monies raised from the 1938 Jubilee Appeal and the rest of the money came from general revenue. W.S. Sprott-Boyd, a student at Grammar in the early 1900s donated £100 to the Appeal, a large sum of money at that time.

The downstairs part of the building was set aside for the Headmaster's study, a Master's Common Room, the School Library, a Reading Room and a couple of smaller classrooms. The second floor was named the Big School Room and was 70 feet by 25 feet and included a wide verandah where lockers for the day students were situated. Folding doors were incorporated so that the room could be divided into three separate classrooms. When fully open the room became the Assembly Centre. It was to remain the Assembly Centre until the completion of the Spencer Hopkins Building in 1979. Until 1994 the Spencer Hopkins' building was open on the ground floor and assemblies were held in this area. The attached photograph shows that many of the Honour Boards and photographs graced the walls of the upper floor in the period after World War Two. The upper floor was designed in such a manner as to take into account the vicissitudes of the climate and the needs of the boarders. The northern wall consisted of louvres and casements so that the prevailing winds would cool the rooms. A Sydney company specializing in the lighting of schools and public buildings introduced an innovative lighting system for that time so that boarders could study at night in a shadowless and diffused atmosphere.



Assembly Room 1947

The School was not to enjoy the benefits of the new building for too long. With the outbreak of World War and Japan's entry into the war in December 1941, the School was taken over by the RAAF on 25 February, 1942. Number 3 Fighter Sector Headquarters [3FSHQ] set up their administrative centre in the new building. The top floor was given over to the WAAAF who set up a system which monitored and identified all aircraft in the region and initiated air-raid warnings. On 4 March, 1944 the group was renamed 103 Fighter Control Centre. At the end of 1944 the RAAF vacated the grounds and the School could return from their Rosslea site. In a letter to a friend in Sydney, written after the end of the war, Tommy Whight states that the classroom building had been left in surprisingly good condition by the departing troops.

While fortunate not to suffer damage during the war the Maurie Blank Building suffered severe damage from two cyclones. On 6 March, 1956 Cyclone Agnes blew the roof off the building, causing water damage to much of the top floor. As School House had suffered severe damage during Cyclone Leonta in 1903 and there was concern the same would occur with Cyclone Agnes the boarders were first marshalled into the Maurie Blank Building but were soon moved when it became obvious that they were in some danger. They were moved back into School House which suffered minimal damage. It was to take three weeks before the building was again in workable order. Cyclone Althea on 24 December 1971 raised the roof of the building and was to cause \$40,000 worth of damage. It is a reflection of the improvement of building standards at the School that the Maurie Blank Building was the only building to suffer damage during Cyclone Althea.

During its long history the usage of the top floor has experienced minimal change. Until very recent times the rooms remained as classrooms and when the folding doors were opened it became, at times, a debating centre, examination centre and a meeting place for year level groups. With a refurbishment in recent years the top floor is now a staff room for English teachers, the office for the Director of Sport and a classroom.

The bottom floor has undergone many changes over the years. With the growth of the School a need arose for a more extensive administration centre to be set up. When Alan Morwood became Headmaster in 1975 the area that had been classrooms was turned into the finance office. Offices were provided for the Headmaster and his Deputy and a room was set aside as a Board Room. There were also two small rooms set aside for the storage of school records and a lunch room for the office staff. During Richard Fairley's time as Principal there have been some major renovations and, in particular, the incorporation of the many Honour Boards that have been brought up to date and renewed. The Boards in themselves reflect the long and varied history of the School.

In recent years quite a few past students who enrolled in the late 1930s and 1940s have returned to the School and are pleasantly surprised at the changes that have taken place to the building. They speak fondly of the assemblies held on the top floor and have memories of the Junior and Senior Certificate examinations they sat through while at School. Like School House, it is a building that holds great memories of the past.

MR BILL MULLER
School Archivist