

# FROM THE ARCHIVES

## PERFORMING ARTS

The School has had a long and abiding interest in the performing arts and this has been encouraged by many of the Headmasters at the School.

The first production at the School occurred in 1889. The Townsville Herald reported that on 21 December of that year scenes from Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* were presented at Speech Day. In 1890 scenes from Sheridan's *The Rivals* were acted out. The tradition of performing scenes from plays at Speech Day continued from that period until the retirement of P.F. Rowland in 1938. It should be noted that for the first fifty years of the School's history all Speech Days took place during the day and were held in the garden of the Headmaster's house.

P.F. Rowland was a great supporter of the arts and encouraged theatre and music, not only in the School, but in the wider community. Rowland believed in the Grammar School philosophy of languages as the core of the curriculum. As a consequence performances on Speech Day included scenes in various languages. An example can be found in the 1907 Speech Day where students performed scenes from *The Odyssey* in Greek, scenes from *Aulularia* in Latin, *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* in French and *Julius Caesar* from Shakespeare. As all students at that time studied the classics it can be assumed that some of them would understand what was said! The trend of doing performances in various languages continued throughout Rowland's time although Greek was removed from the curriculum in the 1920s. The 1920s and 1930s also brought a greater emphasis on music and singing especially after the formation of a girls choir after World War One.

Rowland was also a great supporter of the arts in the Townsville community. In 1906 a theatre group named *Ye Olde Club* was formed and consisted principally of past students of the School. The club would perform annually in the School of Arts Building. Rowland also wrote extensively in the local press encouraging the city to embrace theatre performances and in his 1927 Speech Day report he talks fondly of watching the West End State School performances of Gilbert and Sullivan's operettas. In the report he speaks highly of Gladys Moncrieff's singing in *The Gondoliers*. The Australian Dictionary of Biography sums up Rowland's time as headmaster by stating that "Rowland retired in 1938 after 34 years of sacrificial leadership of a small provincial grammar school in a cultural backwater." It can be argued that Rowland spent much of that period trying to overcome that cultural vacuum in Townsville.

The period 1939 to 1974 can be seen as a period when the performing arts were to take a back seat in the School's activities. Many reasons can be given for this including the effects of World War Two and that under the Headmasterships of M. Blank and L. Daniels a greater emphasis was placed on sport as well as the establishment of new clubs such as Debating, Music and Chess. This is not to say that there were no performing arts during the period in question. Concerts were held on an annual basis and from time to time plays were entered into the North Queensland Drama Festival. One play *Midsummer Night's Dream* was performed in 1967 with current Middle School teacher, Cheryl Kybus performing as one of the fairies.



The performing arts received a boost when Alan Morwood arrived as Headmaster in 1975. Morwood was a supporter of the arts and in his first year *Charley's Aunt* was performed by the students. The play was performed in the Theatre Royal and it was the first occasion a play had been produced off the school grounds. Theatre received a real boost with the appointment of Glennys Perry to the staff in 1979. Some of the memorable performances directed by Glennys Perry include shows such as *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *HMS Pinafore* and *The Mikado*.

Along with the amazing development of Music in the School over the last decade, the new Performing Arts Complex will undoubtedly open a new chapter in the School's history and can only but help in further developing what is already a great tradition of the arts at the School.

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