

GIRLS IN SCHOOL

In spite of girls being enrolled at Townsville Grammar from Term 2, 1893 they were long treated as second class citizens in the School. The School's attitude is best encapsulated in the 1936 School Prospectus, a comprehensive document, which allows only two lines to Girls. It reads: "A limited number of girl scholars are received: for them there is a special recreation room in the Headmaster's garden." This special recreation room was aptly termed *The Dovecot* by the girls who, for many years, made it their very special place. It was with the appointment of **ALAN MORWOOD** as Headmaster in 1975 that a greater number of girls enrolled. Coupled with this and the sense of greater equal opportunity amongst the sexes, the *Dovecot* gradually lost its place as a feature of School life.

In fairness to the first Headmasters of the School [**HODGES, MILLER, ROWLAND** and **BLANK**] I do not think they regarded the girls as second class citizens. The first three Headmasters were all products of very traditional schools in England and were Oxbridge students. They were educated at a time when the education of girls was very much a secondary issue. One is left with the impression that their policies towards the girls were put in place, not to demean them, but to protect them from the boys in and around the grounds.

The first reference I could find concerning *The Dovecot* and how girls were treated is in the June 1899 School Magazine in an essay named: *A Day in '96* by Una: obviously a pseudonym. Una writes that there were four girls enrolled in that year and they were given a small room in the Headmaster's garden to call their own. It was sparsely furnished but there were cups and a heating system for making a hot drink. They were not allowed to appear at assemblies or to enter classrooms unless the boys were first seated and then they had to sit in the front of the room. There were two bells to end each lesson: the girls left on the first bell and they had to return to *The Dovecot*. The boys could only leave at the second bell. At the end of the day the girls were given up to five minutes to tidy their area, pack their bags and leave the grounds. Only then would the boys be released from the classrooms.

BERYL BELL [nee BARKER 1941] writes to say that her mother **VERA JENSEN [1918]** attended Grammar and often talked about *The Dovecot*. By that time, *The Dovecot* was situated in the north-east corner of the Headmaster's garden and was a solid little room [about 10 feet by 12 feet], two steps off the ground and contained a wall of lockers. The garden was a haven of cool shade and large trees and the girls ate their lunches there. In 1918 there were only six girls but by the time Beryl Bell [1941] was a student there were thirty girls and *The Dovecot* was crowded. In a memoir written in the 1980s **MAY STEPHENSON [nee KEANE 1916]** says that at first she thought the room was called the *Duck House* because that is what the boys called it. She said she always wondered why the girls were called *Duck* because none of them seemed to waddle.

Mr Kim Allen, in his history of the School published in 1988, argues that the system as described above lasted until Rowland resigned in 1938. He believes that the girls who attended the School in those years were selected for their intellectual capacity and general behaviour and that the Headmasters of that time designed a system aimed at achieving a maximum degree of segregation. In fact, the system reflected Rowland's insistence on presenting an untarnished image of the School to the general public. In addition to this, School Spirit and the work ethic were remarkably strong.

The advent of World War II and the subsequent move of the School campus to *Rosslea* in Hermit Park lead to a change in attitude. I can find no evidence of a Dovecot at *Rosslea* and, in fact, girls took major roles in the School. Due to labour shortages girls were asked to help with the darning of clothes, to grow vegetables and to help with cleaning classrooms. In fact, it was a period when the sexes grew closer on the campus, reflecting the changes in society at that time. More co-educational functions were organized and a greater spirit of co-operation existed. Much of this attitude can be attributed to Tommy Whight, the Headmaster at that time, who was a remarkable man in many respects as he kept the School together during an extremely difficult period.

When the School returned to the North Ward campus after World War II the buildings and grounds were in a very poor state. The Headmaster's house and *The Dovecot* no longer existed on their original site. *The Dovecot* was re-instated in a position close to where it had been. **HEATHER TAIT [nee MCINTYRE 1972]**, now a staff member at the School, says the room stood where the Middle School MS1 room now stands. It faced the side-road which still passes through the School and overlooked the old Dining Hall, now a PA building. Heather says the two ends were timber to the roof but both sides had timber sidewalls about one metre high. From there up it was wire fencing. As a consequence the girls at the time named it the *Birdcage*. Heather says that in summer the girls baked, if it rained the girls and the bags were soaked and in winter they froze. Furthermore there was no privacy for the girls. With the growth in girl numbers the building was never adequate. It was subsequently moved to the Burke Street side of the RHEUBEN Science Block. Even this move was unsuccessful and the concept of a girls' room faded.

MR BILL MULLER
School Archivist