

# FROM THE ARCHIVES

## 1908

What was Grammar like for a new student arriving on his or her first school day one hundred years ago? Forty new students enrolled at the beginning of 1908, thirty-five boys and five girls. This was the second highest enrolment in the then twenty year history of the School. Boarder numbers were twenty-eight, the highest enrolment at that stage of the School's history. Most of the boarders would have come from the then flourishing city of Charters Towers and from properties to the west while most of the day students would have come from suburbs close to North Ward. School records from that era show that the majority of the day students lived either in South Townsville, Railway Estate, Hermit Park, Mundingburra or German Gardens [later to be re-named Belgian Gardens]. The majority of students would have attended the primary schools in those suburbs with West End Primary being a major contributor. Getting to the Grammar School would not have been easy with the majority of day students walking to school, usually on a dirt road where the Stanley Street cutting now is. Mary Foley, Grammar's first girl enrolment, wrote in a School magazine how she would walk to school, in heat and wet, from her home in South Townsville.

School facilities were rather sparse in 1908. Colin Bingham, a student at Grammar from 1913 to 1916 and later editor of the Sydney Morning Herald, describes Grammar in his autobiography *The Beckoning Horizon* as having a bleak background of brick and cement, of wood and timber, under the menacing bulk of Castle Hill. In 1908 the main building was School House, re-built after the destruction of Cyclone Leonta in 1903. The top floor of School House was set up for boarding while the bottom floor consisted of classrooms. A timber Science Block existed on what is now the Quadrangle and in 1908 a small gymnasium and boarders' common room was added to the Science Block. A magnificent old Queenslander existed where the Middle School now stands. This was the Headmaster's residence but also included the sick bay and some rooms for resident staff.

Subject choices were rather limited and all students had to study English, Latin, French, Arithmetic, Algebra, Geometry, Chemistry, History and Geography. After three years of study students sat for the Sydney University Junior Examination and after five years the Sydney University Senior Examination. It should be noted that very few students stayed after three years. There was no university in Queensland until 1911. Sport was limited to Cricket, Rugby Union and some British Association Football [Soccer]. The School had a couple of tennis courts and swimming classes were held at an enclosed net area close to where the Tobruk Pool now stands. A Cadet Unit was introduced in 1907 and was popular with the students. All the ball sports took place on what is now the Sports' Reserve. The School owned the land at that time. It was taken away from the School in 1924 in exchange for the land that now encompasses the top playing fields. Any new student interested in drama would have thrived in 1908. The Headmaster was a great enthusiast for productions and each year plays were presented in English, French and Latin. Singing was important and the last lesson on each Friday was set aside for singing of the School songs and other forms of music.

All new students would have had very little difficulty getting to know the teaching staff. Besides "Boss" Rowland, the Headmaster, there were five other teachers. Joining the staff in 1908 were E.L. Dunster from England, a fine cricketer, and D.N. MacGregor, a representative rugby union player. MacGregor was the first person associated with the School to be killed in conflict. He was killed at the landing at Gallipoli on 25 April, 1915. Another teacher was T.D. Kay who came close to being the Tasmanian Rhodes Scholar in 1906. Kay and MacGregor made names for themselves when they cycled from Townsville to Brisbane in the 1909 Christmas break. This was the first time the feat had been achieved.

There were ten prefects to look after the new students. Three of these prefects [A. Foot, C. Johnson, H. Tuffley] were to be killed in action during World War I. Another prefect was George Hall, Grammar's first Rhodes Scholar. Hall was in the boarding house as was A. Brookes. Brookes was tipped to be Grammar's second Rhodes Scholar but was drowned at Southport in 1912 while rescuing three young ladies from the surf.

In many respects, life would not have been easy for a new student attending Grammar in 1908. For a day student the daily journey to school would have posed problems and coupled with the rigid academic programme there would have been very little free time for leisure activities. A school term would also not have been that easy for a boarder. In 1908 there were three terms a year and because of the problems of communication very few boarders would have been able to travel home in term time. There were no hot showers for boarders and electricity had yet to be introduced into the boarding house. Weekends would have been quiet as there were sporting fixtures only for the older students and all boarders had to attend church on a Sunday. Yet, in spite of this, there is no doubting that all the students attending the School were provided with the very best opportunities to develop their abilities. In this respect very little has changed over the hundred years since 1908.

**MR BILL MULLER**  
*School Archivist*