THE HEADMASTER’S RESIDENCE

When the first Trustees of the School commissioned an architect to design what is now School House, part of the contract was that a residence for the Headmaster was to be built. The overall cost of the two buildings was £6,200 and a residence built in the style of a traditional Queenslander was erected on the site where the Middle School now stands. This residence was to last for seventy-six years and was to be home to seven Headmasters and their families. The Headmasters were Upward, Hodges, Miller, Rowland, Whight, Logan and Blank. When Mr Blank moved to the new residence in 1964 it ended a most fascinating chapter in the history of the School.

The residence was a large structure and included the school laundry, kitchen and dining room as well as the sick bay. Until the end of WWII the salary of the Headmaster was supplemented by a stipend which was paid for the number of boarders who had to be fed. Thus the wife of the Headmaster would also act as the housekeeper. The Headmaster’s wife would also be the School matron: this continued until the death of Mrs Rowland in 1925 but even after that date the role of matron was undertaken by the two daughters of Mr Rowland. The role of matron was often quite an onerous task because, at times, many of the boarders were often bed-ridden with either malaria or dengue fever. At one Speech Day, Mr Rowland reported that every boarder in the School had been affected by dengue fever.

Mr Hodges was Headmaster from 1889 to 1900 and in that time the residence became a menagerie for birds and animals. In a book edited by Jack Pollard, Birds of Paradise: birdlife in New Zealand and Australia [1967] he recounts a story written by D.Le Souef called “Black Prince of Townsville Grammar”. Le Souef writes about a pet cassowary that lived under the Headmaster’s residence stating that the Headmaster, appointed from the Rugby School, and always immaculately dressed in a three piece suit would wander around the School with his arm around the neck of the cassowary and whose other companion was a white cockatoo. Chickens were also allowed to live under the residence and the cassowary would avail himself, on a daily basis, of the eggs laid by the chickens. Goats were also allowed to roam around the grounds of the School.

The residence took on a different function for the next Headmaster, Mr Miller [1901-1904]. On March 9, 1903 Cyclone Leonta hit the School completely destroying School House. Mr Miller had taken the precaution of battening down the doors and windows of the residence and thus the residence suffered comparatively little damage. Mr Miller had taken the girls out of the classrooms and put them into the safety of the residence. While School House was totally destroyed, the residence stood firm against the cyclonic winds although the dining room attached to the rear was unroofed and the laundry disappeared and the kitchen chimney fell with a crash. In the immediate aftermath of the cyclone, repairs were made to the dining room and for a few weeks the boarders were housed in the residence until more suitable accommodation could be found for them.

On return to the main campus the residence was occupied by Mr Whight [until 1946], Mr Logan [1947] and then Mr Blank until the residence was demolished at the beginning of 1964. A new residence was built on a site close to where the Manual Arts’ Centre is now situated. Mr Daniels took up residence in 1966 but in February 1975 the house burned down. Mr Daniels was to lose all his personal belongings in the fire. The Trustees found temporary accommodation for the Headmaster and in May 1975 they signed a contract for £47,950 for a, double storey, four bedroom house to be built on the corner of Paxton and Landsborough Streets.

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