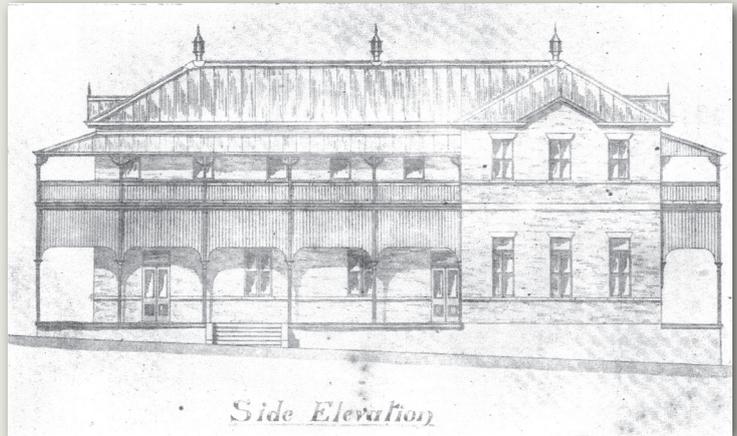


SCHOOL HOUSE 1904-2014

“Just imagine if you could put your hand on one of the walls somewhere and have the building tell you about its life since 1904-and know you were part of it.” Jack Callcott: a boarder from 1965-1968

On 8 February, 1904, the building now known as School House [named as such in 1978], was opened by the Mayor of Townsville, Alderman T.Smyth. The original building constructed in 1888 had been destroyed to such an extent by Cyclone Leonta in April 1903 that the Townsville Bulletin reported on 19 October 1903 that “the cyclone left the building in such a wreck that the new building would have to be totally reconstructed”. Now one hundred and ten years later the building is once again undergoing a restoration with the aim of making it as elegant as it was those many years ago.

As Jack Callcott, now President of the Past Grammarian’s Association, suggests in the quote above there is a wonderful history attached to School House, a history not only of the building but a history of those who were part of the building. For over one hundred years many boy boarders have spent a formative part of their lives living in the building and they all have stories to relate of their experiences there: whether these stories are related to cold showers, the “ghost hole”, trying to get the better of staff or other typical schoolboy pranks.



School House (Sketch from 1904)

When the new building opened, the ground floor was used entirely for classrooms aptly named Big School and Little School while the first floor provided a dormitory for 25 students and bedrooms for 3 assistant teachers. The facilities provided were spartan and there was no electricity in the building until 1926. Students would study until 8:30pm with the help of hurricane lamps and would then go to bed. They would get up at 6:00am, shower and then do an hour’s prep before having breakfast. There was no hot water for showers in the dormitory block until 1967 and a hot water system only eventuated due to the efforts of some senior boys who ran a canteen to raise money. In his autobiography, Colin Bingham [1913-1916] describes the process of the morning shower. Seniors would supervise the showers, whereby the boys would be lined up, raced through the shower, soap themselves on the other side and then race through again to rinse themselves.

Until 1940 the ground floor consisted of classrooms. Big School became the area where Form V and Form VI students held their classes while Form III and Form IV classes were held in Little School. By 1938 student numbers had grown to such an extent that the biggest room was divided into two by a green baize curtain hung on fencing wire. Students from that era tell of the story that the only phone in the School was situated in one of the classrooms. The number was a three digit number with one digit different from that of the mentally insane ward at the General Hospital. Students reported that Mr Rowland, the Headmaster, would always answer the phone and was often heard to say: “wrong number, but not very different from the place you are trying to contact!!”

In February 1942 the School was taken over by the RAAF and School House became a dormitory barracks for personnel. The RAAF vacated the School at the end of 1944 but School House had been badly-treated and neglected. Students and air force personnel graffiti left in the roof structure is still evident today. Mr Whight, the Headmaster, was faced with the enormous task of re-building the School. Boarding numbers were surprisingly good and a new shower and toilet block had to be added on the western side of the building. For the first time the ground floor became student accommodation and not classrooms.

Under the inspiring headmastership of Mr Blank [1948-1965] and a better economic climate in Australia, boarder numbers grew rapidly so that in 1964 a new boarding block was built on the northern side of the quadrangle. In 1973 there were 102 boarders sleeping in School House and 48 in the 1964 building. In the 1970s the Trustees also embarked on an upgrading of facilities programme which included carpets being laid in School House. Much to the chagrin of those steeped in boarder history the laying of the carpet put an end to the initiation ceremony of introducing new boarders to the “ghost hole”. As boarder numbers increased in the early 1980s the upper eastern and southern balconies of School House were covered in and became dormitory extensions. However, in 1986 the upper eastern balcony was deemed too dangerous and was demolished.

With the opening of the Parker Hall facility in 1996 the bottom floor of School House was vacated by boarders and it became partly a uniform and bookshop and partly the Finance Office. In the same year the building was painted in heritage colours. Boarding in School House came to an end in 2011 when it was deemed unsuitable for students to live on the upper floor. It signalled the end of a long and interesting stage of the School’s history.

School House is about to enter the next stage of its history. The Trustees have embarked on an ambitious and costly restoration plan to restore the building to its former glory. Work is already underway on the exterior. When this is completed the intent is to restore the balconies as they originally were in 1904. It is the hope of the Trustees that, when finally completed, School House will, once again, be the wonderful focal point it once was for the community.

MR BILL MULLER
School Archivist