

THE SCHOOL IN 1945

Two important international dates were celebrated in 1945, May 8th and August 15th. May 8th was to be named VE Day marking the end of World War Two in Europe and August 15th was to be named VP Day marking the end of the War in the Pacific. The two occasions were celebrated, with great joy and relief, around the world including Townsville, a garrison town. The year 1945 was also an important one for the School as the campus on Paxton Street was re-opened after three years of RAAF occupation of the School building and grounds. While the ending of the war was a joyous one for many, 1945 would be an extremely difficult and burdensome one for the School and the Headmaster, T.B. Whight, in particular.

The excitement of returning to the Alma Mater with a record enrolment of 89 day-boys, 67 boy boarders and 43 girls was tempered by the fact the RAAF had left the School grounds and buildings in a state of disrepair. R.W. Moore in his History of Townsville Grammar School writes that on his return Mr Whight found "the lawns on which masters and students had spent long hours in 1940 were deserts marked only by jeep tracks: buildings were scarred and altered, tennis courts destroyed, white ants had been allowed to run riot." The RAAF also did not vacate the ovals until June 1946 and the School had to lease part of



Aerial Shot of TGS in 1945

of the Sports' Reserve to allow sport and physical education to continue. Furthermore, the Army Hiring's Department reneged on the initial contract struck in 1942 and only compensated the School the sum of £3,200 for the use of the School buildings and grounds.

Undaunted by the task facing him, Mr Whight, with the help of some Trustees and many students, set about readying the School for an opening on 5th February, 1945. It was to be a year of great difficulties best summed up in a letter Mr Whight wrote to a friend at Sydney Church of England Grammar School in late 1945. In the letter he writes: "First, the financial side. The School at the moment has about £4,000 in cash, £3,500 accounted for necessary painting and repairs, new bathrooms for boarders, and a septic system: as well as new beds and book lockers." He goes on to add that the School is in sad need of an expenditure of about £10,000 and that there would be very little profit in future years.

Mr Whight's financial problems were further compounded by the fact that the 16 guineas per annum that students paid for tuition plus £1,300 in an endowment from the government barely covered the cost of the teaching staff wages. At the beginning of the School year, teacher's wages were increased with the maximum set at £550 per annum for an experienced teacher. In his letter to his friend, Mr Whight stated that he had to employ inexperienced teachers. With many teachers still in war service, Mr Whight employed three female teachers and one male. The male teacher proved unsatisfactory and was let go mid-year. His position was taken by two part-time female teachers. The brunt of teaching all the Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and Latin classes fell to Mr Whight. In his letter Mr Whight also stated that he had to take a reduction in his own wage in order to cover costs. In spite of the staffing difficulties, Mr Whight did add that he had a "pretty good staff and they did a good job."

Boarding, however, did show a small profit but costs had to be kept to a minimum. Mr Whight said that it cost 17 shillings a week to feed a boarder and that residential staff, working in the kitchen, laundry and school grounds, were costing about £40 per week in wages. It is difficult to imagine what meals the boarders would be eating on the 17 shillings a week!

In spite of the difficult period the academic standards at the School did not suffer. Much of this could be attributed to Mr Whight who was an inspiring schoolmaster. In 1945, H.E. Holmes was awarded a Queensland University Open Scholarship as was B. Emerson in 1946. This scholarship was awarded on an annual basis to the top twenty students in the State. In 1945 K.L. Wellington was awarded a Social Service Fellowship as was A. Seawright in 1946. The State Government awarded ten scholarships annually to students wishing to study either medicine, dentistry or veterinary science. Bryan Emerson and Alan Seawright were both later to become professors at the University of Queensland and world authorities in their area of expertise. A. McDermott, a student at this time, went on to serve with distinction in Korea, Malaya and Vietnam.



Mr Whight was also keen on sport for both girls and boys and in 1945 was instrumental in the formation of the Townsville Secondary Schools Competition for inter-school sport. Rugby league was re-introduced and the School was able to field three teams in the local schools and junior competitions. Sport was also played against schools from Charters Towers on a home and away basis. Unfortunately, there was no inter-school sport for girls but Inter-House Girls' Sport for the Grimsey Cup was played with great enthusiasm. Hodges House was victorious and Miller prevailed in the Duffin Shield for boys' sport.

The year 1946 was to be a better one for Mr Whight. Former teachers in M.W. Blank, G. Owen and R.C. Watts returned from war service and A.J. Roberts, a past student, was employed. However, the toll of the war years at Rosslea and the struggles in 1945 had taken their toll and Mr Whight resigned to take up a position at the Sydney Church of England Grammar School. A former student at Townsville Grammar, Mr Whight had performed a great service to his school.

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