

## HISTORY OF THE SCHOOL OVALS

In 1884 the inaugural committee behind the establishment of the School wrote to the Queensland Minister of Lands asking for a reserve of land of 55 acres [22ha] behind Queens Gardens. Instead, a site of 25 acres [10ha] at Kissing Point was granted to the committee. A debate over the location of the site then ensued as the committee felt that Kissing Point was too far out of town. The state government was persuaded, by the committee, to change the allocation and in 1886 a 10 acre [4ha] site was secured from the botanical gardens reserve on the corner of Burke and Paxton Streets. The original School block had its boundaries on Paxton Street, Burke Street, the gully that runs through the school grounds and Warburton Street.

The first sporting ovals at the School were situated on what is now the Townsville Sports Reserve. A cricket pitch was installed by the first Headmaster, C.H.Hodges, and football matches were also played there. As Townsville developed and the population grew more and more sporting clubs were using the ovals for club fixtures. Legend also has it that a plane, in difficulties, also made a forced landing on the oval in the early 1920s. In 1924 the City Council approached the Trustees about swapping the Sport Reserve for 6 acres [2.4ha] of land to the west of the gully with Landsborough Street as the western border. As part of the exchange the Council also agreed that Grammar students would always be allowed free entry onto the Sports Reserve. This condition, however, has long been forgotten! The original School ovals must have been in very poor condition because the Townsville Bulletin wrote on 24 January, 1928 that the Council was finally going to make improvements so that players would no longer experience gravel rash and the spectators would not be covered in dust.

Led by two masters, T.B.Whight and C.R.McLean [both past students] the Old Boys set out to improve the new fields by erecting a grandstand. Over £125 was collected and, aided by a further donation from the Trustees, the pavilion was built and improvements made to the grounds. However, with the onset of the Depression and the on-going debt caused by Cyclone Leonta [1903] very little progress was made although rugby league and rugby union fixtures were played against schools from Charters Towers in the 1930s.

Between 1942 and 1944 the School and the Ovals were taken over by the Australian Army. When the students moved back to the North Ward campus in 1945 they found that the ovals were deserts, marked only by jeep tracks and concrete blocks that had served as foundations for military housing. In December 1945 the then Headmaster, T.B.Whight, launched the War Memorial Appeal with the express purpose of remembering the many students who had served in World War II but also to include the re-building of the grandstand and the re-generation of the ovals. Work on this project was only to start in 1949 and was completed in 1951. The Memorial Gates [facing Paxton Street] were swung and the fence along Landsborough Street and the gully was completed. What had become known in School legend is that the wall on the western edge of the main oval was built by boarders over a period of years. It became known as Blank's Wall in honour of the then Headmaster who 'press-ganged' boarders into weekend work on the wall.

The first major change made to fields, west of the gully, was the building of the School pool in 1965. Aided by donations from the J.S.Love Estate, the Ladies' Committee, the Parents' Association and funds raised by the teachers and students, the pool was built without the Trustees having to borrow money. In 1971 the house just above the pool and now named Gate House was erected. Now a boarding house it initially housed the Deputy Headmaster. This house received some damage during Cyclone Althea. In 1975 the Headmaster's house, situated where the Design and Technology rooms are now located, burnt down and a new house was built on the corner of Paxton Street and Landsborough Street. For many years this was the Headmaster's house but is now a residence for boarding staff.

To commemorate the centenary of the School in 1988, the Trustees decided to build the Centenary Gymnasium. This was the first building in the history of the School to cost over a million dollars. The building was also a first for the building industry in Townsville as the walls were fabricated in the gully and then put in place by a crane. A crane had to be imported from Brisbane before the building could be completed as none large enough to erect the panels existed in Townsville.

In 1993 the Headmaster, Mr S.C.Paul proposed, that in order to commemorate one hundred years of girls at the School, girl boarders be enrolled. The Trustees agreed to this proposal but it meant that a new boarding house had to be built. Girl boarders were enrolled from 1994 and lived in temporary dormitories until the building now named Parker-Hall in honour of our two Rhodes Scholars was opened in 1995. Various sections of this building have been named after prominent past students. They include Foley and Crowder named after the first two girls to enrol, Foot after two brothers, both boarders, who were killed at Gallipoli and McConachy, also a boarder, the only past student to be killed during the Vietnam War.

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