Arthur Pate’s eulogy on Alan Blackwood 9 Feb 2015

My name is Arthur Pate, and I have been asked to speak on behalf of Christ Church Grammar School because I was taught by Alan Blackwood and also served with him on the School Staff, so I shall endeavour to speak for his past students and colleagues in summarising his contribution to a school in whose development, between his joining it in 1949 and retiring from it in 1983, he played a highly valued part.

In 1949, the School had 242 boys. We would form up in three ranks in our form groups in the School drive and the prefects would march us across Queenslea Drive for Assembly in this very church. Mr Blackwood and the Teaching Staff in their suits and academic gowns would fill the rear pews and the Headmaster or Acting Headmaster of the day would conduct Assembly. Interestingly enough, it was Headmaster Peter Moyes’ predecessor who left a note for him referring to Alan as a “potential troublemaker”, probably because the young teacher was an innovator. For instance, in my Junior Certificate year he took me for Physiology and Hygiene and we went on several excursions, one a memorable tour of the Peters Ice Cream Factory, and one to the Swanbourne Sewerage Works with its huge bacterial tanks where I just could not understand why some of the boys broke down into bouts of hysterical laughter at the party balloons floating languidly in the waste liquid.

Alan’s main subject was Mathematics, which he began teaching in 1949. However, he also had extra-curricular duties, gained as his leadership qualities came increasingly to the fore. In 1951 he was made responsible for Physical Education and games. He coached the First Eleven cricket, the First Eighteen football and the Athletics team – to this day I still end my seniors workout with the femoral quadriceps stretch he taught us.

Also in 1951 he was appointed Officer Commanding the Christ Church Grammar School Cadet Unit. I remember his first parade. It was on the Top Oval and we were formed up in close column of platoons. Most of us knew of his Military Cross and how (according to Staff Member Mr Bill Rucks) he had been promoted in the field, so we were keen to see how he performed. His first order was, “Fall out, the supernumeraries!” No one moved. This wasn’t mutiny; it was simply because we didn’t know what on earth he was talking about. “Fall out, the supernumeraries!” he repeated, more loudly. Not a single muscle even twitched. “The supernumeraries are the sergeants!” he bellowed, and there was action at last.
In 1956 Alan was appointed to the position of Master of the Middle School, was appointed as a field judge in the Melbourne Olympic Games and was selected as one of Christ Church’s representatives of the Public Schools Sports Association. Looking ahead, there was the Blackwood Trophy for sportsmanship and skill in basketball, which Alan presented to the School in 1982, and the Alan Blackwood Junior Golf Trophy, donated by former parent Mr Ainslie Lamb in recognition of Alan’s valuable contribution to this School sport.

In addition to all his duties and interests, Alan graduated in Mathematics after studying part-time at the University of Western Australia. In the 1983 Mitre, the School magazine, the then Principal Mr Peter Moyes wrote of Alan, “He is a fine Mathematics teacher as many an Old Boy knows, patient with the plodder, stimulating to the able, well-versed in the tricks of the lazy, and ever ready to give that extra time to the student who called for help.”

In 1960 and 1961, Alan’s eagerly anticipated attendance at the 1962 Rome Olympic Games seemed threatened by matters out of his control. In spite of this he stood firm in his commitment to the welfare of the School, stepping in as Romsey Housemaster until the appointee could take up the position, moving in as Acting Headmaster and Queenslea Housemaster when the incumbent fell seriously ill, until the Headmaster returned from leave and Alan could finally have his Rome Olympics trip. Alan then finished his leave by gaining further teaching experience on the staff of Giggleswick School in the UK before returning to the positions of Queenslea Housemaster and School Senior Master at Christ Church.

The remainder of Alan’s career at Christ Church, 1962 to 1983, are best described in the words of the then Headmaster Mr Peter Moyes, the man who worked with him most closely. As Mr Moyes points out,

‘...the happenings, initiatives and additional buildings changed the School. In all these, Mr Blackwood as Senior Master (re-named Deputy Headmaster in 1966) had a major role. He was involved in the appointment of the teaching staff, the development of Adventure and Civil Emergency training in the cadet Unit, the reorganisation of the House and Tutorial system and one could not imagine him being not fully committed in sporting activities. He continued to coach the hurdlers until he retired. As a member of the Council’s Education Committee he took part in policy making such as the establishment of Kooringal and
outdoor education, and the Special Education Unit for the integration and education of the handicapped. In addition he was a member of the committees which were planning new buildings and alterations and renovations to existing ones. In reality this has meant almost every building which now stands on the main school site, at Mount Claremont and Kooringal, the Murray River campsite.”

I would like to conclude by quoting some lines from Shakespeare’s “Julius Caesar” which express Alan Blackwood’s values and achievements very aptly:

“His life was gentle, and the elements so mixed in him That nature might stand up and say to all the world, ’This was a man!’”