



# Remembering Rev. Sir

CAROLINE STOK, ARCHIVIST

In 1920 The Geelong College's 5th Principal, Rev Frank Rolland (1878-1965), commenced at the school; his tenure lasted until 1945.

**Much has been written about Reverend Sir Frank Rolland over the years and each reflection paints a picture of a man who had an incredible influence on our College.**

**With 2021 being The Geelong College's 160th year, we wanted to look at things differently: who was 'Mr Rolland' in the eyes of his students?**

**We spoke to nine Old Collegians about their memories of their Principal, and their time at College.**

There is no denying the last impact Rev Frank Rolland has had on the past students of The Geelong College.

Each of the 'Old Boys' we spoke with had unique memories of him, and of their time here at College.

"(School) was so long ago but it seemed like an eternity at the time," said David Salmon.

During Mr Rolland's tenure the school was smaller.

"Everyone knew each other and all about them."

Generations of families had the same Principal. At one point, at least eleven cousins were all students at the College at the same time.

Everyone spoke so highly of Mr Rolland. Parents and grandparents recalled fond memories of their own time at the College, and passed that respect down to their children.

Mr Rolland only taught one subject – Religion – so students were more likely to encounter him at assembly and around the school grounds where he joined them for a chat.

Despite his position of authority, his approachable manner meant that students such as Eric Mitchell had 'no fear' of knocking on his study door.

"He would listen intently to what one had to say – even a 15 year old student."

On Saturday evenings Mr Rolland would visit the Junior Boarders Common Room to read and tell stories as Bill Huffam fondly recalls.

"I can still picture the door opening and he would come and sit with us."

It was during these informal Common Room gatherings that the boarders got to know more about their Principal; that he had trained to be a Presbyterian minister, worked at the Dunesk Mission in outback South Australia and had been a padre in the AIF.

Reverend Rolland regaled the boarders with his stories of 'nurses on camels', life in the outback, and serving hot cocoa to soldiers.

These life experiences combined with Mr Rolland's easygoing nature meant that he was not a traditional disciplinarian. According to his students, he had a 'cool and level approach'.

That's not to say he didn't enforce the rules.

"I remember once he caught students shooting rabbits with shanghais, and he admonished them...but in a nice way.

"The Vice Principal was often the 'hatchet man'."

Ben Johnson recalls the boys crowding outside the Vice Principal's office



Left: Reverend Rolland in 1945, and in service during WW1  
Above: Reverend Rolland (front middle) and the 1945 College Prefects.

# Frank Rolland

and counting the strikes being dealt to students who had misbehaved.

In contrast, they recall at least one occasion when Mr Rolland challenged a misbehaving boy to a game of tennis in lieu of traditional punishment. On the court, the boy was thoroughly bested.

When World War II hit, Mr Rolland deeply felt the lows, and celebrated the highs.

“At assemblies, he would announce the names of past students who had been killed with tears in his eyes.”

When peace was declared Mr Rolland cancelled the day’s classes.

“There was a conga line on the oval!”

The sense of relief that the war was over was palpable as Mr Rolland watched the boys celebrate.

In addition to his love of fun and frivolity, Mr Rolland is also remembered for his spirituality and prayers at assembly.

“He would close his eyes when saying his prayers. There was a simplicity and a purity about the prayers he took.

“I had heard he was such a hero, and when I met him, he was so gentle. I thought that, as it was a Church school, he might be one of God’s messengers.”

However, some students proved harder to engage in religion than others.

“The (religious) message didn’t get through to all of us.

“Young boys don’t like being asked about these sorts of subjects!”

Mr Rolland’s impact has endured far beyond the school gate, with each Old Collegian having their own story to tell.

“He set a moral compass for the boys and taught the principles of philanthropy,” George Tippett recalls.

“I had a good rapport with Mr Rolland,” Andrew Hope said. “While I was studying at university, Mr Rolland wrote to me suggesting I consider a career in ministry.. and that’s what I became.”

For Peter Eaton, Mr Rolland sparked a lifelong interest in Australia’s outback.

Some years after school finished, after his marriage, Ken Lewis again made contact with Mr Rolland. He was amazed to find his former Principal knew him immediately.

“He actually remembered me. He was still the same friendly tall man with blue eyes.”

No small feat, considering the length of Mr Rolland’s tenure at College and the number of students he had taught.

Though it’s been 54 years since his passing, his legacy lives on in the lives and memories of his past students. And it’s clear to see why.

**Read more about Mr Rolland and his life on The Geelong College Heritage Guide**  
[cutt.ly/RevRolland](http://cutt.ly/RevRolland)



“He was a tall man way up there.”

“Very, very tall, outstanding man.”

“He had a blissful way, very content.”

“A tall, slim distinguished person with an aura of quiet authority.”

“He was a great presence.”

“He had real dignity”

“He was known as ‘Mr Rolland’ or ‘The Head’ or by the nicknames ‘Wot Say’, ‘Lofty’, and Franky’.

- *Recollections from Old Collegians*

*Bill Dix (OGC 1939), Peter Eaton (OGC 1940), Rev Andrew Hope (OGC 1942), Bill Huffam (OGC 1944), Ben Johnson (OGC 1938), Ken Lewis (OGC 1942), Eric Mitchell OAM (OGC 1943), David Salmon (OGC 1943), George Tippett (OGC 1940)*