

Former Prime Minister and Modernian, the Honourable Robert Hawke AC GCL visit to Perth Modern School

In December 2013, the school was very pleased to have the Honourable Robert (Bob) Hawke AC GCL, himself a Modernian (1942-46) visit the school whilst he was on a visit to Perth. Mr Hawke spent an hour talking with Year 10 and Year 11 students, teachers and invited alumni, about current political standards in Canberra, which he described as being very 'worrying', and proposing how parliamentary processes and the quality of debate in parliament could be improved by a less combative, and more non-partisan approach.



Mr Hawke reminisced about his enjoyable time as a student at Perth Mod in the pre-war era which was occasionally punctuated by air-raid shelter drills. He spoke about student life at UWA and Oxford university as a Rhodes Scholar, his time in the House of Representatives (from 1980 to 1992), his period as Prime Minister from 1983 to 1991, and the importance of his family as a child growing up. In an emotional answer to a question from the audience, he described his father as his best mate and confidant. He stressed how much he respected his mother (a school teacher) and in particular, her strident campaign for country girls to be assisted (rather than being hindered) to obtain the same secondary and tertiary education opportunities as boys.

Mr Hawke said his father's Christian faith continued to influence his outlook. *"My father said if you believe in the fatherhood of God you must necessarily believe in the brotherhood of man"*. The poignancy of this would have resonated with the audience just three days later following the death of Nelson Mandela, when Mr Hawke answered Leigh Sales' question: *"Why were you so active in combating apartheid in South Africa?"* by saying *"Apartheid was evil"*.

He told students to make the most of their time as a student and study hard, to develop a range of skills and to make the most of their capabilities to help others and the community.

Mr Hawke kept this talk short in order to maximise time for the many probing questions that followed. At the conclusion of what was undoubtedly a shining moment at Mod in 2013, Mr Hawke was joined on stage by the choir and led the whole audience in singing *Moderna Scola Te Amamus*.



At morning tea afterwards in the McCusker Room, Mr. Hawke conversed easily with students and teachers - see photo. The Perth Modernian Society President Peter Farr privately expressed to Mr Hawke the honour felt in having such a distinguished former student return and continue to make a contribution to Perth Modern School.

The morning finished with informal photos being taken with students and the Principal Lois Joll near the school oval.