

A CONDENSED HISTORY OF THE OLD BOYS UNION

The proposal to form an Old Boys' Union was made at the dinner which followed the Old Boys' Football Match in May 1894 and the first meeting was held at the school the following August. A later meeting elected the first committee and appointed the headmaster as president.

During the first year sixty-one Old Boys joined the new Union and paid an annual subscription of 2s. 6d., although they had to pay an additional 2s 6d if they wished to receive the Torch Bearer. At first the Union did not hold an annual dinner of its own but continued to regard the Old Boys' football match as its major social occasion. In 1897, however, the Rev. Davies suggested that the annual reunion might now take the form of a formal dinner. The first dinner, held that year, was at Quong Tart's restaurant and they were able to celebrate the fact that the Union now boasted a membership of one hundred Old Boys.

Although formed primarily as a social group, the Union recognised from the outset that it should also serve the school whenever it could. An Old Boys' Prize Fund was established to provide annual prizes at the school for athletics and rowing, and in 1898 an additional prize was established for an essay on the history and resources of Australia. This link with the school was reinforced when it was decided to use the Torch Bearer as the official journal of the Union.

The first building project supported by the Union was the Memorial Library, built in memory of Old Boys who were killed in the Boer War. The foundation stone was laid in 1902 and the plans were prepared and donated by an Old Boy, M.L. Clarke. Old Boys made generous donations to the fund and when the building was opened in 1903 it was almost free of debt. So, indeed, was the Union, for at the annual meeting that year it reported a balance in credit of 4s. 11d.

The annual dinner had always been followed by a Smoke Concert, and for many members this was probably the best part of the evening. In 1904, however, it was decided to abandon the concert so that there could be more time for speeches, a step that was not universally popular even though it was probably more healthy.

At this time, though, the finances of the Union were rarely healthy. The credit balance of 1903 has been reduced to 7d in 1905, although the treasurer was able to report that while membership had exceeded one hundred for some time, this was the first year in which he had actually received more than a hundred subscriptions. Even so, by 1907 the credit balance had disappeared and the Union's books were showing a loss.

The Chapel

It was a matter of considerable regret to the first two headmasters of Shore that the school did not have a chapel, even though they recognised that in the infancy of the school, born as

it was just before the financial crisis of the 1890s, funds of that magnitude were simply not available.

Despite the fragile state of the Union's finances Old Boys involved themselves fully in raising the funds to build the Chapel.

In 1905 a joint committee of the Council and the Old Boys' Union started a building fund, which opened with a donation of £1000 from Council and a promise by Thomas Dibbs to contribute ten per cent of the total cost. By 1913 there was enough money in the fund for building to start. A new design was prepared and a tender of £5668 was accepted from the many submitted by builders interested in carrying out the work.

By the time the Chapel was finished, however, it had the sad task of holding memorial services for Old Boys who died in the War.

Much of the cost, and nearly all the cost of furnishing the building, came from donations. The Walter and Eliza Hall Trust gave £1500 to the Chapel Fund and also, incidentally, established a scholarship at the school for the sons of Anglican clergy. The eight windows in the nave all commemorate Old Boys who died in the war and were given by their relatives. The original organ, which cost over £1000, was donated by the widow of Lt. Pockley, who had also been killed in action. A group of subscribers led by the Rev. Davies contributed more than £1000 to the east window, which commemorates the services of Old Boys in World War 1.

In 1916 the committee introduced a Union badge, and one was sent to the parents of Old Boys who were killed.

The Beginnings of Northbridge

By the time World War I started, sport was more widely played within the school and as the numbers grew, so the facilities became less adequate. By 1916 the school had grown to four hundred boys and the school ground could barely cope with a third of that number. The St Leonards Park Oval was hired almost every afternoon of the week to provide additional facilities but there was no guarantee of permanence and when the use of the oval was handed over to the recently founded North Sydney High School, Shore was placed in the embarrassing position of having to ask its opponents to provide the grounds.

The danger of depending on St. Leonards Park Oval has been recognised by Headmaster Purves for some time and for the previous two years he had spent much of his spare time cycling around the northern suburbs in search of land that could be converted to playing fields. It was not an easy task for by then most of the land within a reasonable distance of the school was already in use or far beyond the resources that were available. The exception, fortunately, was the area at Northbridge on the northern side of the suspension bridge. A large development company had planned a suburb there but the company had failed in the crisis of the 1890s and the land had been largely overlooked since then.

Purves discovered two sites at Northbridge which he thought would be suitable and the one he recommended to Council in 1916 was an area of about 10 hectares on the corner of Alpha

Road and Sailors Bay Road. This land was owned by the Royal North Shore Hospital and in 1917 Council bought a section of about 4 hectares for £3800.

Although this section was relatively flat, that is about all that could be said for it. In reality it was an overgrown wilderness and it took a great deal of work to convert even this modest area into playings fields. Most of the work was funded by the Old Boys' Union, which had been involved with the project from the start. The enthusiasm of the Union in raising funds was such that when the hospital offered the school an adjoining block of 4.4 hectares in 1918, Council had little hesitation in buying it, even though they were also involved at that time with developing new rowing facilities at Gladesville. In the end, the fund-raising for both projects was combined into one fund, with two-thirds going to Northbridge and the rest to Gladesville.

The main oval at Northbridge was finished in time for the opening ceremony in 1919, and it took place between innings in an inaugural match between the School and the Old Boys.

The oval had been prepared by the caretaker of the Sydney Cricket Ground but later that year Mr Ferrier was appointed the first full-time groundsman. An appeal in the Torch Bearer for a horse to be used for mowing and rolling brought a 'fine mare' from an Old Boy in Orange. Unfortunately this horse died shortly afterwards but a replacement sent by the same Old Boy served valiantly for many years.

Additional facilities were built over the next few years, some as a result of fund raising and some from individual donations, and in later years the grounds were extended with the purchase of small blocks of land on the boundaries.

OBU Representative on School Council

Over the previous decades, but particularly since the war, a close relationship had emerged between the school and its old boys. As in other church schools, the relationship had been formalised by the new ordinance of Synod in 1923 allowing for the election to Council of five representatives of the Old Boys' Union. (These would be in addition to the existing provision for six laymen). With the introduction of this arrangement, the Old Boys' Union would come to exercise an indirect but important influence on school administration and policy. Of the five Old Boys' Union members elected for the first time in 1924, R.W. Carey and A.B.S. White were previous lay members of Council. Carey would remain on the Council until 1932, A.B.S. White until 1945, being Secretary for most of the 1920s. Dr A.H. Moseley would serve on the Council until 1942 and Dr F.G. Antill Pockley until 1932, the same year in which the fifth Old Boys' Union representative, Mr Dudley Williams also retired. All five would play an active part in Council affairs.

These changes were associated with a search for some independence on the part of the Union itself. In 1926, it was decided to discontinue the traditional practice whereby the headmaster of the school had been ex officio President of the Union. Despite opposition from the new headmaster, the Union now decided to elect its President from amongst its own members. The first, holding office for two years, was N.Y. Deane. A.B.S. White succeeded him in 1928-29.

The Schools Club

In 1923 the Union formed a committee to examine the possibility of establishing an Old Boys' Club with permanent premises in the city. The committee reported that such an idea was feasible provided the membership was not less than four hundred. The club opened in 1924 in a building in Phillip Street which already contained the club rooms of the Old Boys of Sydney Grammar and Newington.

In 1925, when King's was about to form a similar club, it was suggested that the GPS schools might combine to establish a single club in which each school would have a room or section for its own Old Boys, and thus retain its individuality, while sharing common facilities such as the lounge and dining room. This idea had obvious merit and in 1927 the Schools Club opened in Hamilton Street in premises leased from the Sydney Morning Herald. The participating schools were Shore, Newington, Sydney Grammar, King's and Scots, with The Armidale School as an associate member.

In 1946 the name of the club changed to the Alpha Club so that it could obtain a licence, after which the club was renamed the Schools Club. In 1962 the club moved into larger premises in Underwood Street, but with falling membership in later years the club amalgamated with the University Club to form the University & Schools Club, which still exists.

Reunions

So far the Union had held its reunions in Sydney, but with Old Boys living in the bush and elsewhere there was an obvious need for local functions to bring them together. In 1936 organisers were appointed in several country towns to arrange Old Boys functions on a regional basis and to act as a liaison with the Union in Sydney and the School. This soon extended to other States and in 1937 the first overseas branch of the Union was formed in England. During the war a group of Old Boys tried to form a Shore Association in Changi and although not successful in a formal sense they remained as a loosely knit group throughout the rest of the war.

Old Boys Remembrance Service

In 1946 the first Union Chapel Service was held at the school and this has been an annual event since then. Services are now held on Remembrance Sunday and during the service flowers are placed on the two Books of Remembrance which list the names of those who died in the World Wars. After World War II Old Boys made many contributions to the fund for the building of the Memorial Hall and all the profits from the annual dinners were donated to this fund until the building was paid for.

Today, the Old Boys' Union has a membership of about 5000 and has representatives in all Australian State capitals and in thirteen country areas of New South Wales as well as in London and New Zealand.

The Union has a major responsibility in electing five of its members to the school Council. These members are elected for a term of three years, with a maximum (since 1991 of three ,

three year terms). If a member retires in the middle of his term the committee of the Union elects a replacement. Elections by members for these places, however, are quite rare and have occurred only three times in the last thirty years.

Although the Union has always been prominent in raising funds for the school, that is not its role. Instead, its aim is to keep Old Boys in touch with the school and with each other and to provide representatives to the Council. In recent years it has been very active in providing careers advice to school leavers, which, because of its varied membership, it can do with a great deal of expertise.

Every year the annual general meeting of the Union, which is held at the school, is now followed by the Old Boys' Tea in the dining hall and this is hosted by the headmaster and the School Council. This is the major social gathering of the Union and is very well attended. There is also an annual dinner and sports day held at Killara Golf Club. Country, interstate and overseas groups all hold functions of their own throughout the year.

Five reunion dinners are held each year for those who left school fifty, forty-five, thirty-five, twenty-five and ten years ago. These are organised not by the Union but by an Old Boy of the respective year, but the Union provides encouragement and advice on how they might be organised and sometimes makes the first approach to a suitable and willing organiser.

In 1988 the Old Boys committee was responsible for the first publication of the Old Boys Register called the "Centenary Register 1889 to 1989".

While the committee was delighted with this publication, it was felt that it would be worthwhile publishing in the OBU Centenary Year the vastly improved and expanded version which you are now reading.

This period (early 1990's) also saw the establishment of the Alumni, or Year Groups, whereby an Old Boy was appointed as a year leader for each school leaver year. Also significant during this period was the excellent co-operation and communication between the Foundation and the Old Boys Union.

(Compiled by Tim Kierath, from information relating to Old Boys contained largely in Peter Taylor's "A Celebration of Shore" and Geoffrey Sherington's "Shore".)