

THE BEGINNING OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS' CLUB

Those stalwart members present at the 1959 A.G.M. of St Peter's Collegians' Association listened in apoplectic and disbelieving stillness as a renegade, but articulate, old boy made the breath-taking declaration that the Association was moribund.

Recognising that this irreverent denunciation was not entirely inaccurate, and hoping to create the opportunity to enhance the Association's cash flow the secretary diligently produced for the next Committee meeting a report recommending the formation of a St. Peter's Collegians' Club.

The Headmaster, C.E.S. Gordon, in exercise of his pre-rogative as an influential ex officio member of the Committee, roundly condemned the proposal. Already, he said, Saints old boys tended too much to congregate together. Any scheme which might exacerbate that incestuous tendency should be nipped in the bud, and right smartly. Old Saints boys, he said, should be out there mixing in the community.

Colin Gordon, as always, made his point with forceful, if not ferocious, logic. The Committee listened to him and suggested that the secretary have another think about it all.

So the secretary got together with his P.A.C. counterpart, Ross Johnston, and they quickly found common ground in the concept of a Saints and Princes (Princes & Saints?) Club. They widened their horizons even further when Romilly Carveth Harry (he of the moribund phraseology) offered one year's rent free accommodation for such a club in his Hackney Road premises.

We looked across the border to the now defunct Public Schools' Club on the corner of Spring Street and Flinders Street Melbourne, and we looked further north to the Schools' Club in Sydney. Both seemed to have what they called "GPS Schools" as their constituents although the Sydney Club was restrictive in sectarian respects. We became aware of the London Public Schools Club which had not long before merged with the East India Club in St. James Square. We had in the mind our Head of the River, and the schools we had played against in football and cricket and tennis and athletics, and we thought of the things that those schools had in common. We could see no reason for sectarian barriers, but we needed guidance - and from Colin Gordon and John Dunning, the headmaster of Prince Alfred College, guidance was what we got.

St Peters Collegians' Association and Prince Alfred Old Collegians' Association each conducted a formal survey of members. In each case the response established beyond doubt that support would be forthcoming for a low subscription club. We would have the numbers to make a club viable, and so we called our first meeting late in July 1959.

Two representatives each from what soon became the 10 founding associations - twenty people in the smallish boardroom of South British Insurance in Wymouth Street - nineteen of them smoking - all but our red-eyed host, John Formby Carne, the Chairman of St. Peters Collegians' Association.

Everybody was a bit guarded at that first meeting. That phase passed fairly quickly as we all became more enthusiastic and more confident, notwithstanding the lack of money and members and a permanent home. The other eight founding associations conducted informal surveys; there was no doubt - we had the numbers. Continuing concord with our founding associations and schools was enshrined, we thought, in a fundamental club rule prescribing that membership for old scholars of each of the founding schools was to be contingent upon continued financial membership of the applicable old scholar association. Thus, with a permanent ongoing reservoir of potential members from the founding associations we could indeed look to the long term future with confidence. In this respect we were unique.

We had several meetings in that smoke-filled room and we set up our committee structure - the Provisional Club Committee and sub-committees for Finance (Max Rungie in the Chair), Membership (Peter Trumble), Rules (David Haese), House (Bob Thomas), Squash Courts (John Carne) and Premises (Brian Fricker). Co-ordination was effected by the Executive Committee which comprised all sub-committee chairmen. together with Bill Ewing (Chairman of Committees), Ross Johnston (Secretary), and Jan Black (Treasurer).

Brian Fricker commenced talks with Lady Sandford who was sympathetic and believed that the late Sir Wallace Sandford would have approved of the Public Schools Club Inc. as the owner of 207 East Terrace. The National Bank came to the party with the support of guarantees from 20 trustees - 2 from each of the founding old scholar associations.

And so we had premises - but no licence. We had by this time enrolled 1100 paying members and we were determined to open our doors whether or not the tedious and uncertain process of conducting a local option poll had secured a liquor licence. The long-established Amateur Sports Club was rumoured to be fading fast. Here, we thought, was our chance to gain a licence by merger. Sadly, for us, the ASC committee thought otherwise.

Then we learned that the City Club Inc. (previously North Adelaide Cycling Club, a.k.a. The High Bike Club) was approaching disintegration or forced amalgamation. Their committee was receptive and in due course called a meeting of their members to make certain prerequisite amendments to their Club rules. After countless meetings our intricate plan was devised and submitted for legal advice from Trevor Taylor (who became one of our first fully paid-up life members) and legal opinion from Leo Travers Q.C. (later Mr. Justice Travers) who was President of Sacred Heart Collegians.

This was the plan: - at 2359 hours on Thursday 30 June 1960 some 500 of our members (in respect of whom our Club was to pay a nominal per capita joining fee) would be admitted to membership of City Club Inc. - the holder of one of the only five 24 hour licences in this State. At midnight the 300 odd members of City Club would resign and be admitted to membership of the Royal SA Yacht Squadron Club in the basement of T&G Building. Thus, at 0001 hours on Friday 1st July the membership of Public Schools Club Inc. (Which owned premises at 207 East Terrace) would be identical with that of City Club Inc. (which owned a billiard table and a 24 hour liquor licence).

Three days before the event - we lacked the 1000 guineas which was to be paid to City Club as joining fees. Bill Ewing, Ross Johnston and Max Rungie anxiously sought audience with our President-elect, Ian Dudley Hayward and told him of our problem. He fixed it immediately.

We opened our doors for trading (legally) at 10.00 a.m. on Friday, 1 July 1960 and then followed the complex process of changing the name of Public Schools Club Inc. to PSC Inc. (the landlord) and changing the name of City Club Inc. to Public Schools Club Inc. (the licence holder). Finally the assets of PSC Inc. had to be merged with the assets of the long-lived but newly named Public Schools Club Inc. PSC Inc. had served its purpose and was duly put to rest.

It had taken just under a year to establish the Club, and by the end of 1960 all of the requisite legal formalities had been attended to.

By dint of hard work, innumerable meetings, abundant and spirited debate, and quite extraordinary team spirit and co-operation, we had achieved rather more than Romilly Harry and Colin Gordon and John Dunning could have expected.

Despite frequent differences of opinion on just about everything, not one of us deviated from our common objective. We were helped much by our Foundation President, Ian Hayward, by our secretary/manager the proud Scot F. Donald Clark, and his dear wife Edith, by devoted staff like Leila and Baruta and George Bodossian, and by our members who had supported our debenture issues generously.

Thus did the Club bring together old scholars of schools which, in the words of that great headmaster, Sir James Darling, "..... have ideals and principles (which) must be clearly seen, and they must be ideals of which, even if we do not always live up to them, we can still be legitimately proud."

We had a Club with a soul.

W.J.M. EWING 15
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