



History of the Old Buckwellians Association - Part 1 - the 1940s

State grammar schools were in many respects run on public school lines, and the latter invariably boasted a prominent and active former pupils' Association. In the school magazine of 1945, headmaster JH Taylor wrote:

I note signs of the growth of the school in the expansion of its activities... I look forward to the foundation of an old boys' association at the end of the war.

The first leavers from BHCHS said goodbye in July 1943, five years after the school opened. Two years later, on 9th June 1945, the first former pupils' reunion was held. This also marked the formation of the *Old Boys' Association*, as it was originally known. The original subscription was 'five bob' (25p).

The inaugural chairman was the redoubtable Fred 'FAS' Scott, Head of Science and later Deputy Head. This appointment was no doubt reflective of the callowness of the original OBA membership, and the perceived need for a mature guiding hand. Certainly the school needed the OBA to succeed for the enhancement of its own kudos.

In 1946 the school magazine, reported:

Signs of our having arrived at our majority continue to appear. The Old Boys' Association is swelling in membership and in the number of its activities...

...The Headmaster reported with gratification the large membership of the recently formed Old Boys' Association in spite of the difficulties of forming one when leavers had so soon to enter the armed forces.

That year, for the first time, the Association contributed its own report for the school magazine, in a clipped, militaristic tone, evocative of the era:

The Old Boys' Association has now been in existence as a going concern for nearly a year, and it is fitting that we should review all that has happened during that time as we make our plans for the future. The informal organisation which was set up at the inaugural meeting last summer has worked exceedingly well. The district representatives who were chosen then have met regularly in committee throughout the year. The OB's are already indebted to these stalwarts to an extent which it must be difficult for the rank and file to appreciate...

It went on to mention said stalwarts by name (surnames only of course), including *Slade* — Des Slade (1939) — who was joining the Royal Navy, but was to be OBA's 'Forces Correspondent'.

An attempt to get an *Association Football Club* going had to be abandoned due to lack of available players, though a couple of matches against the school did take place, both won by the school. The first Old Boys versus school match had in fact taken place in 1944, and was won by the school, 5-1. The team eventually got going a year or two later.



One of the first OBA football teams, about 1948

Photo Bill Robinson

OBA reported in 1947 that one of its prime difficulties was that the universities and the Services took up so much of the time of its members. As regards how to make joining OBA an attractive proposition:

We hope that one day we shall have our own clubhouse and playing field.

With the benefit of hindsight, one might say, "be careful what you wish for". For in time this aspiration would come to dominate OBA thinking, efforts, and finances for many years, with unfortunate consequences.



In those early days, as the OBA endeavoured to find its feet, BHCHS supported it as much as possible. School facilities were made available for weekly club meetings (intended to start in January but postponed until May because of the terrible winter of 1947), for dances, and for sports.

The weather that year also hampered the development of the fledgling football team, but in 1948 they managed to beat the school twice. A cricket team started up in the summer of 1949, and a tennis section started playing at Grange Farm. A 'dramatic evening' was held in 1948 (there would be more dramatic evenings over the years to come but not necessarily involving the performing arts), and two dances were held.

At the 1949 AGM a constitution was drawn up and approved, and a new committee was elected.

It would be unwise to say in a School Magazine what form we hope the annual dinner will take.

Thus wrote committee member Tony Flower (1938) in 1947. What they had in mind is anybody's guess, but the first annual dinner did in fact take place on 1st December, 1949 at the Kings Head, Chigwell. According to the Hon Secretary Basil Chase (1938), it was:

..socially and gastronomically unparalleled in our modest history. Precedent having been established it shall not be allowed to lapse.

And indeed it has not been allowed to, since an annual dinner has been held every year since.



The Association was finally given its present name in 1951. Des Slade remembers:

I was competing in the high jump at an athletics match held at Bancroft's School. They asked who I was representing, and realising that I had to be more specific than 'the Old Boys', on the spur of the moment I coined the name 'Old Buckhurstians', which was duly recorded.

But this was not destined to be the adopted moniker. How did that then come about? Norman Willis (1940) explains:

.. I can tell you because I was there. Fred Scott had called a meeting of Old Boys (of which I had just become one) to choose a name for the proposed Association.. I spoke against the "Old Buckwellians" name because I told him it sounded like a swear-word. Fred was very cross with me, not only because I was being coarse, but also because it was the name he preferred. The rest is history.



Fred Scott

The 1946 school magazine (having coined itself as '*Roding*') had suggested calling the Association, '*Old Rodings*', this being:

.. not less suitable and certainly more pleasant sounding than some of the names we heard ..

If the school itself had been named 'Roding County High School' (as it arguably should have been) then this suggestion would surely have been a 'no-brainer'. But in the event, '*The Old Buckwellians Association*' was officially adopted, only '*after long deliberation and considerable controversy*'. No surprise there then.

No one knows for sure who actually dreamed up the chosen name (though the smart money is on Fred Scott). This rather trite, clumsy combination of *Buckhurst Hill* and *Chigwell* was no doubt thought to be a clever and imaginative solution. As a result however we have been saddled with something of a mouthful ever since.