



History of the Old Buckwellians Association - Part 3 - The 1960s

Throughout the 1960s OBA was dominated by its clubhouse and playing fields project. Firstly there was the considerable effort of making it happen. Subsequently the huge problems that it caused had to be addressed.

Peter Miller wrote in *Roding* 1960:

A ground and pavilion of our own. A meeting place where the aims of the Association could be fulfilled. This was to be the object of the all Bucks willing to give them support .. by Spring of 1962 this should be a reality.. I hope that the doubting Thomases and the cold feet merchants will consider what this means. It means that the Old Bucks of this generation will have attained for future generations, a home. This should not be thought of as a millstone for us now. It will be a struggle to hang on to, but what a tremendous attraction for future old boys...'

There was now at least greater realism about the timing, and a recognition of the difficulty of making such a facility affordable on an continuing basis. Membership was now at an all-time high, so the prospect of a home base and clubhouse probably did contribute to recruiting more school-leavers into the OBA.

The clubhouse was to be funded from fund raising efforts, members' loans, and subscriptions. A holding company – Old Buckwellians Holdings (Ltd) -- was set up to manage the financial side of the project and to limit members' liability in the event of failure.

By 1963 £2,000 had been collected. The total cost was now estimated at £7,000, with annual running costs of £900. Efforts were needed to raise further funds from parents. An appeal in the form of a letter from OBA Secretary Des Slade was distributed :

We feel sure that you will want your son to join the Association in due course and therefore hope you will be able to help us in our task.

The carrot held out was in the form of a Founders' Share in return for a £10 donation towards the cost of the pavilion. Founders would receive a certificate and be listed on a scroll placed inside the clubhouse. Peter Haseldine (1960) recalls :

Everyone's parents got a letter asking them for £10 towards the cost of a 'pavilion' for the old boys. My parents paid up, I think because they hoped it would help my GCE results! I wonder where their £10 is now ?



Founders Share Certificate

Des Slade certainly wheeled out the big guns to actively support the appeal:

J.H. Taylor, Headmaster:

A strong Old Boys' Association is the finest testimony to the excellence of its school.

F.C. Lilley, Chairman of the Parents' Association:

The PA has always maintained close liaison with the Old Bucks and would welcome the whole-hearted support of all parents, to enable this long-cherished ambition to be realised.

John Pippard, Chairman of the Board of Governors:

This is an ambitious and far-sighted project and I hope that it will be generously supported.

The proceeds of the Parents' Association Summer Fair in the school's silver jubilee year of 1963 were donated to the OBA pavilion and playing fields fund.

To their credit OBA did manage to pull it off, and by the end of 1964 the clubhouse at Roding Lane North, Woodford Green, was nearing completion, albeit at a basic level. It was situated on an 8 acre site leased from the London Borough of Redbridge, which had spent £15,000 to develop it as a sports ground.

OBA had applied to all the local authorities in the area for a sports ground. At the time local authorities were under pressure from the government to release infill land for recreational purposes. OBA was offered a long lease on the site provided that they built their own clubhouse and car park. Part of the agreement with the Council was that the latter would properly prepare it as a sports field before OBA adopted it.



The clubhouse was designed by former pupil Colin Banfield (1948). Its size and design had been considered carefully. The result was a sizeable wooden structure, with floor area in excess of 2,000 square feet. It incorporated: a large club room for dancing, functions and meetings; a fully equipped bar with beer store; a kitchen; extensive sports changing and ablutions facilities - enough for six teams plus officials; a committee room cum office; and an adjacent car parking area. There were facilities for table tennis, darts, and bar football. The playing field had space for two football pitches, two hockey pitches, and a cricket square.



Jack Sutton (centre) from the 1943 school photo

Contractors put up the main frame of the clubhouse, but much of the interior was completed by working parties of OBA members. The sprung dance floor comprised Canadian maple strips supplied by Richard 'Jack' Sutton (1940) and Trevor Lebentz (1946), which took a team of members three weeks to lay down.

David Collis (1956) remembers :

I helped build (the clubhouse). I also had my stag night there with gallons of bitter poured down my throat- literally. I still made the wedding though !

The main problem was the floor, and when we had the Saturday night parties and everybody was on the floor it bounced up and down

The contracted brewer — the erstwhile Rayments division of Greene King — financed the bar and price discounted the beer.



Subsequent progress was not however trouble free. In the report for *Roding* in 1965, OBA wrote:

We have not progressed with the completion of our pavilion as well as we had hoped... finance and voluntary labour have not been in abundance.



The OBA clubhouse at Roding Lane North, Woodford Green, just after its completion, about 1964. The clubhouse was designed by Colin Banfield (BHCHS 1948-54).

Nevertheless in that year all three sporting sections (football, hockey, cricket) played at the new site and the annual dinner was held there.

OBA News reported in September 1966 that the popular Jack Sutton and his family were acquiring the role of club wardens, and that Jack had also been running the Founders' Scheme.



Despite the shortcomings, in its early days the Roding Lane North ground was a viable venture. Numerous social events were held there. Several visiting football teams included international players (one of whom was Jimmy Greaves, who played in goal). The OB football team, under Trevor Lebentz's captancy, won the Old Boys' League 1st division at their new home ground.

By 1966 the clubhouse had cost £8,000, of which £3,000 was borrowed from Redbridge Council. However, the interior was still not finished off to the desired standard, heating was severely inadequate in the winter, and the car park was not made up.

Most worryingly, the playing pitches were not up to scratch, due to what was described as '*deplorable initial preparation*'. OBA had taken over the ground on the basis that the pitches had been prepared according to the standards laid down by the National Playing Fields Association. However after a few years of use, glass, metal and various objects found their way to the surface. Several serious injuries to players resulted. As a result the football and hockey teams sometimes had to rent pitches elsewhere. Eventually the Old Boys' League requested that no further matches be played there until the problem was resolved.

A professional consultant advised that the ground had not been prepared to the specification stipulated in the contract that Redbridge Council had with its contractor. The contractor had however gone out of business, complicating the matter of redress.

This all brought about another crisis, not ten years after the previous one.



At the AGM in March 1966 three prominent committee members resigned for personal reasons : Chairman Ben McCartney, Secretary Des Slade, and Social Secretary Trevor Lebentz. Many members were at an early stage in their careers, and were thinking about marrying and settling down. The time-consuming demands of being an OBA officer at that time were not always manageable.

Jack Sutton, who had been working very hard for the Association, was elected Chairman. Describing himself as *'brought in to do a rehabilitation job'*, Sutton published in 1967 a comprehensive discussion paper entitled *'Old Buckwellians Association at the Crossroads'*. According to this document :



Jack Sutton

.. probably unknown to you, the Association has just passed a serious crisis that threatened its very existence.

The document did not spell out exactly what this existence-threatening crisis was, but reading between the lines it looks like they ran out of money. Sutton described at length how he believed that the management of the Association needed a complete revision and more professionalism, and that a new editor was required for a better and more interesting newsletter. In addition, since expenditure had trebled in the previous few years and the clubhouse needed another £5,000 spent on it, subscriptions would need to be more than doubled. Sutton summarized with :

Our aim is to make the Association of benefit to all members. But remember 'you get 'owt for nowt'.

Various financially ambitious ideas mooted in the paper included: building a squash court, forming a unit trust, and starting up a travel Association. Fortunately none of these saw the light of day.

The document was accepted by the membership as a fair statement of the situation.

The increased subscription appears to have done the trick for a time. Throughout the rest of the 1960s OBA cruised along satisfactorily for the most part. Certain improvements were made to the clubhouse, the sports sections did quite well, membership was around 400, and a good time was had by all. At the 1968 annual dinner Jack Sutton won the prize draw of £100. He promptly handed back £50 to the Association, and then invited the guests to help him drink away the other £50. The event finally wound up at 3.30am – probably a record for an annual dinner.

In the same year, in an attempt to increase support, an OBA 'supporters' club' was started up, for the WAGS. But it was slow getting off the ground and appears to have fizzled out. A folk club which had sprung up also folded due to lack of support. But Greene King offered to add £500 to an existing £1,500 loan, in order to fund clubhouse improvements. So we can assume that the bar takings at least were well up to scratch. A fund-raising sponsored walk from the Halfway House pub to Woodford Green took place in March 1969. In the same year OBA News reported that Jack Sutton had moved to a larger house.



The bar at the OBA clubhouse, mid 1960s