

History of ALUMNI

The first 'ex-pupils' union' was formed in **1909**, when the enrolment in that year was 131. Audrey Armitage writes 'With the aim of building up a noble tradition of scholarship at Newcastle High, Smith (Headmaster Charles Rattray 'Caesar' Smith) formed in 1909 an ex-pupils union whose objects were to maintain the connection of ex-students with their school and the friendships they had formed while at school, and to promote the mutual improvement of members.

In the first ever issue of the Novocastrian magazine, in **October 1912**, the expupils contributed a page called 'Ex-Pupils' Column' (see below) in which they gave congratulations to the school and its main achievers. They concluded with: 'Ex-pupils Annual Dinner will take place as usual next December, when we hope to have a record attendance.' There is no mention of the Ex-Pupils Union, formed only three years before.

Also in this issue of the Novocastrian, in a summarised history of the school to that point, the formation of the ex-pupils' union was mentioned, with the Annual Dinner described thus: 'During the Christmas Holidays every year a dinner is held, at which as many as 100 ex-pupils have sat down with the Headmaster as President in the chair, supported by one of the local school inspectors, and some members of the staff. A pleasant evening is spent with songs, toasts, recitations and general conversation.'

[The ex-pupils union formed by Smith found that its annual dinner was a social highlight, but this group finally disbanded some time after Mr Smith left.](#) In the second issue of the Novocastrian, **February 1913**, the 4th Annual Dinner of the Newcastle High School Ex-Students Union was described as 'an unqualified success, with all going as merrily 'as a marriage bell.' Ex-students were exhorted to become subscribers to the Novocastrian magazine, posted quarterly for 1/-, to keep 'in touch with the doings of ex-students throughout the year.' Yet, in the third issue of the Novocastrian, **June 1913**, frustration at the demise of the Ex-Students Union was

evident in the following words, penned by R Billett, in the Ex-Students' Page:

Since Xmastime a number of the ex-students have taken up their residence in Newcastle again. Some of us have hoped - but vainly - to see the Ex-Students Union in full swing again. It was rumoured some time ago that when some of them settled down in the Coaly City, that the Union would flourish. I am sure that we would all help to make the functions held a success. A Social Evening, or even a Dance, would be very acceptable this month, whilst the students from the Teachers' College are on holidays. I think it is just about time that the ex-students woke up. It was a hard task to begin the Union, and we ought to help keep it going.

There is no further mention of the Old Boys' Union until the **December 1916** edition of the Novocastrian, when the Editorial, penned by R G Henderson from the English Department, again raises the subject. With tongue in cheek, he suggests that the only possible reason for the fact that ex-students are never seen again must be that they have passed away:

Of the many worries under which we labour as Editor of this Magazine, one of the most disturbing is the thought of the terrible mortality that afflicts ex-students of this school. Many must die, because so few are ever seen again. Are they ashamed of the School, or do they hate it, that they so quickly and entirely lose all interest in what, at one time, was half of their lives? Have not any of them derived any benefit from the old place on the Hill, since gratitude does not make them visit or write to it again?

In other schools, the Old Boys' Union is an important organisation. It aims at doing good to the School and giving its members the pleasure of meeting old school friends or getting news of them. There seems to be no such body attached to N.H.S. We hear of a dinner sometimes held in the Christmas holidays, i.e. at the very time when many ex-pupils, and most of the School Staff, cannot possibly attend. And that is all we ever do

hear of old boys, except by chance, or by a very occasional letter.

We would like this matter taken up. We want to see an organisation formed having as its objects:

- (1). To help the Old School in every possible way.
- (2). To hold Social re-unions at convenient times.
- (3). To attend all school functions en masse.
- (4). To arrange matches with the School in Cricket, Football, Tennis, &c
- (5). To subscribe to *The Novocastrian* and keep it supplied with news of expupils. This term will no doubt see the departure of a fair number of our present pupils. We hope they will bear all this in mind. This Editorial is not merely meant to look impressive on the first page. It is earnestly addressed to every pupil, and especially to those on the point of leaving.

In the voyage of life may they have fair winds and calm seas, and as they progress, let them remember "Remis Velisque." But do not let it stop at memory; do something.

Of course, throughout this article, "Old Boys" includes "Old Girls." (English is a strange language!).

In the **June 1917** *Novocastrian* the Constitution of the Newcastle High School Union is given in two detailed pages, without preamble. Membership of the Union "shall be open to all boys and girls attending the school, together with the staff of the school." In the June 1919 *Novocastrian*, under School Officials: Sports Committee, the Newcastle High School Sports Union is replaced by Newcastle High School Union. In the July 1920 edition, the School Union Committee is given separate billing, followed by listings of Girls' Sports and Boys' Sports.

In the **December 1918** *Novocastrian* there is an item headed 'An Ex-Pupils' Function', which describes a function to welcome home Ex-pupils who were Returned Soldiers. It is not clear if this is a revival of the Ex-Pupils' Union. However, the item concludes with: 'We would like to draw the attention of those readers of *The Novocastrian* who have already left the High School, and those about to leave, to the fact, that the Secretaries would be pleased to know their names and

addresses. We intend holding another dinner about March, to welcome home a second batch of soldiers, and if interest in the Union is sustained we hope to hold a series of dances during the winter months.

In the **July 1920** *Novocastrian* the first three items are 'An Ex-Pupils' Union', 'Ex-Pupils' and 'The Re-union Dance'. The first, attempting once again to encourage the formation of such a Union, states: There has been great social activity lately among the ex-pupils of this school, as can be seen by reports elsewhere in this issue. This emphasises what we more than once pointed out, the need of an Ex-Pupils' Association. These functions have been managed by self-appointed committees at their own risk – a risk they should not be called upon to take. Obviously, too, there is no certainty that the energetic and self-sacrificing few that managed the dance will be willing or available every year. But such functions are too valuable and enjoyable to be left to chance. With a properly organised society, the continuance of all these and many other activities could be made certain. We have had a tennis match of school against ex-pupils. But why not a football match, and a cricket match? Ex-pupils, by such encounters, and by their visits, can do a great deal for a school, in the way of raising school spirit, and lifting the vision of pupils beyond the school itself. To themselves, too, an Ex-Pupils' Society can be productive of great pleasure. We hope to see the idea taken up energetically, while there is so good an opportunity. The following item then begins: On **December 19th, 1919**, the evening when school broke up, a social was held at the Masonic Hall, Hamilton. Those present came from third and fourth year and old boys and girls not so old, or at any rate not looking it. There were about eighty to indulge in the games and dances arranged to fill up the evening, and they all seemed to enjoy themselves.

Note that, at this time, there was an extra year, called 'Remove', between First and Second Years, so that Fourth Year was the final year.

The third item describes the ex-pupils Reunion Dance, held on 8th June. It is described as a success: Many ex-pupils have for years past felt the lack of an opportunity for reunion with old schoolmates, and none of the former attempts

have met with anything like the success which attended the recent venture.

In the **June 1921** edition there is a brief description of the Ex-Students Social, including: Several games new to our social evenings were indulged in, all being most interesting and amusing. No speeches bored the gathering, and all were free to give themselves wholly towards the fulfilment of a most enjoyable evening. Towards the close of the social light refreshments were partaken of, and then after "God Save The King" the party dissolved merrily with "Auld Lang Syne." There is an item under the heading Ex Pupils which tells of the current status of many ex-pupils, and other items referring to sporting matches between past and present students.

In the **December 1921** Novocastrian there is a long article as below: **Ex-Pupils' Union.** – Just as the last "Novocastrian" was being prepared a meeting of former students of the Newcastle High School was held. It was unanimously decided to form a union of ex-pupils, in order that old friends may meet regularly at some sort of social gathering. It was decided that the subscription, which was fixed at 5s a year, should include current copies of the school paper, the "Novocastrian," which the editor, Mr. Henderson, promised to feature news concerning ex-pupils. Mr. Saxby was asked to supervise the choice of a badge for ex-pupils. He stated that he hoped to obtain the advice of Mr. Piper in regard to the design. The wish was expressed for monthly meetings this year, and it was expected that in the second Wednesday in July a meeting would take place, if possible, in the Brown-street school hall. The constitution was made as simply as possible. The office-bearers elected were: (there followed the list, with Mr. Saxby as President). Ex-pupils who wish to join the union should write to (the Secretary) at the address given. Those already members SHOULD EXERT EVERY EFFORT TO PROCURE NEW MEMBERS. This is vital for the success of the union.

A couple of small socials were held in Brown-street, and were none the less enjoyable if they were small. An attempt was made at "Hindu Tag", a chasing game, in which you cannot be "caught" if your forehead is on the floor. The floor was not thought enough, and by special

request chairs were added, whereupon the assembly assumed a very devotional aspect. A variation is that you cannot be caught if your right foot is in your left hand. Leaning against walls is prohibited. We can recommend these games to social organisers as well calculated to "break the ice."

A more elaborate effort was made on August 29, in the form of a social; at the Parish Hall. The date was chosen to come into the University vacation, and we had the pleasure of seeing many of our friends, who are making names for themselves in Sydney. Among those present were (list of names, of 23 ladies and 22 young men). The room was nicely decorated. Games, dancing, songs and recitations made the evening pass briskly, and as a means of reuniting school friends the affair was a great success.

The next function came very shortly, in order to keep it also in the University vacation. This was a ball at the Oddfellows' Hall on September 8. The hall was prettily adorned with streamers, there was a first-class orchestra, and Zeenie Clarke and her band of helpers deserve every credit for the general excellence of the arrangements.. Most of those at the previous social were at the dance as well, and some others in addition. (Our society reporter had a list and lost it.) The dance was both a social and a financial success, and will be repeated next year. (Fourth Year, please note.)

After these strenuous exertions an interval elapsed, and then a beach tea was arranged for October 15. This went off very enjoyably, but the attendance was small; so the committee, nothing daunted, determined to try again. This time the weather took a very decided hand. Apparently, it had determined on a very extensive advertising scheme, and that Saturday afternoon let loose one of its best all-round displays. Still, the spirit of the school surviving in thirteen hearts brought them along, and the unlucky number did not damp their ardour, though the storm dampened everything else. The items on the programme were many and various, and everyone did his best to disarrange them. Fred. Pearson has been cultivating the domestic virtues lately: he served tea quite nicely, and the colour scheme of the flavouring he put in the ice-cream was much

admired. Of course, he'll be getting his degree soon, and those accomplishments may then come in handy. A desire for dancing on the concrete verandah led to the formation of a jazz band. It was difficult to say whether they played a good tune badly or a bad tune well. In fact, all tunes seemed alike to them. R. Frith was the leader; he also won the ice-cream eating competition in 1min 43 sec, a very creditable performance, considering the weather. The girls won the foot-golf easily. We heard a lot of gossip at that beach tea. For example, N. Lillycrop and W. Arthur grace the beach by their presence in the surf. (That's how Arthur puts it.) This later was absent from Walsh Island one day, and next day Mr. Estell, the Minister in charge, gave it up in despair. Really very careless of Arthur! Dorothy thinks Newcastle Beach poor compared with Stockton. After that, it seems unnecessary to give her surname. K. Lackey had had an attack of bronchial pneumonia, but he seemed very much better at tea time. N. Lillycrop and G. Firkin were at Goninan's together, but the latter has deserted and gone to Hereford House for training as a teacher.

The ex-pupils have adopted a badge. It is of diamond-shaped enamel, in the school colours, and in the centre has a shield bearing the letters O.N. (Old Novocastrians). The upper left and the lower right edges of the diamond carry the school motto. "Remis Velisque."

Then, near the end of the magazine, under the heading 'To Pupils Leaving' was this: Whether you have reached the proud and somewhat painful heights of the L.C., or have stopped somewhere short of it, you have been a pupil at this school, and we do not want to forget you or let you forget the school. We appeal to you all to join the ex-pupils' Union. You will find particulars in the "ex-pupil" section of this issue. The Union will give you the opportunity to meet old school friends; it will send you the School Magazine; and it will give you a chance to show your gratitude for what the school did for you. Because the school did do something for you, how much you will not realize till later.

Some of you are going to University, some into the ranks of teachers. They will have an

opportunity to use the intellectual training they have acquired at the School. The others, who will remain in Newcastle, we would urge to join the Workers' Educational Association classes. These will give you, at practically no expense, some of the work which your friends are doing at the University. The W.E.A. is conducted in a democratic, informal fashion, and its work is on a high standard. It is for your own sake that we give this advice; you will be doing yourself a favour by joining the W.E.A. After training your mind to a certain pitch, you do not want to let it go to seed. Keep it occupied.

In the **September 1922** Novocastrian, in listing the prizes given on the Speech Day, 15 December 1921, there is this: 'Ex-pupil's (sic) Prize: The annual prize presented by the Ex-Pupils' Union has been won this year by Ray Cochrane. *Note that this student, who was the Captain and Dux in 1921, was R J Cochrane, as was the Deputy Headmaster at NBHS in 1954 and 1955.*

The annual dance of the ex-students of the Newcastle High School was held in the Tyrrell Hall on Thursday night, August 24, where there was a good representation of ex-students. The hall was arranged with the school colours, which surrounded the room, supported by large fan palms. On the supper tables, intermingling with large bowls of lilies and shaded lights, the colours are again to be found. The list of attendees named 47 ladies and 45 gentlemen.

The N.H.S. Ex-pupils' Union held their first annual business meeting in the Parish Hall in April. Only two of the eighteen attendees were boys. Mr Saxby was in the Chair. The balance sheet included 18 badges at 3/- each. There is mention of a 'Newcastle and Maitland Ex-pupils' Social Club in Sydney'. 'The school war cry was resurrected during the football season, and used by the Firsts in their matches. It is as follows:-

Nova! Nova! New!
Castra! Castra! Castle.
Nova castra We!
Advenient hostes,
Fragite Cervices,
New!
Accerime! Probissime!

Tam acriter! Tam acriter.

'A match missed this season was against the old boys.'

In the **December 1923** Novocastrian it is interesting to note that, in the Staff list there is a position of Supervisor of Girls listed, but no equivalent position for boys. Do girls need supervision while the boys do not?

School Union Committee members listed in with other 'School Officials' but no specific mention of Ex-students Union.

In the **March 1927** Novocastrian it is stated that the school motto 'Remis Velisque', literally 'with sails and oars' i.e. 'with all ones might', was selected by Bishop Stretch. It was described as 'an all together admirable, unique and classical one, from the Latin poet, Silius Italicus.' See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silius_Italicus Outlining the history of the school to that point, it states: "In 1909 an Ex-pupils' Union was formed. During the Christmas holidays, a dinner was usually held, at which sometimes over 100 ex-pupils were present, including the headmaster as president, supported by one or more of the public men of Newcastle. Pleasant evenings were spent, with songs, recitations and general conversation and speeches.' The use of the past tense throughout strongly suggests that, by 1927, and possibly some years before, the Ex-pupils' Union had ceased to function.

In fact, a few pages later, under the headline 'Old Sudents' Budget', the following: "There is a great need for the formation of a Newcastle High School Old Students Union. One appears to have been in existence in the past, but as a body working in the interest of the school it has long since lost consciousness. There are old students, however, who are very much alive to the necessity of giving the Union a fresh lease of life. They have shown their interest by holding a meeting prior to the visit of the Minister of Education in August last, and they appointed two representatives – Mr. N. Cragg and Mr. C. Sara to represent them on the delegation which waited upon the Minister."

And further on: "A few months ago an attempt was made to revive the ex=students' union. Evidently it was not a very serious attempt as it seems to have fallen through."

And: "Newcastle High School is one of the few High Schools in the State that has no Ex-students' Union. Surely in a town the size of Newcastle there are sufficient old Novocastrians to be able to keep an Ex-students' Union going. A few years ago an Ex-students' prize was given annually but even that is a thing of the past. At least there is a likelihood of the new High School soon becoming a reality, and it is now that an energetic Ex-students' Union would be invaluable."

It is not known if there were any other attempts at the formation of an ex-students' association, until the formation of an Old Boys' Union on 1 June 1954, as reported in the Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate of 3 June. A Committee was formed with Alwyn Hannaford, School Captain in 1946, elected President. The annual subscription was set at 10/- and a dinner proposed for July. A box of OBU ties, from this group, is now in the Old Boys' Caesar Smith collection in the Newcastle Museum. It is not known when or why this OBU failed.

On 9 December 1986, in a phone call between Old Boys Dale Kemp and Dick Sanders, it was decided to form the NBHSOBA. It was felt, since the School no longer existed, and all previous 'Old Boys' associations had not been sustained, that it was important that the traditions of the school should be carried forward and not forgotten. Also, a single annual dinner, for all years, would be more efficient and effective in meeting that aim, than the current organising of ad hoc reunions.

The Steering Committee of ten met at the Newcastle Police Centre on 7 January 1987. The OBA was launched at the Police & Citizens' Boys' Club on 20 March 1987, where the inaugural committee was elected by the 93 former students and teachers present. Four Sub-committees were agreed on (Membership, Functions, Education, Historical) together with their members and Chairmen. The goals of the Association were agreed on, becoming the basis

for the Constitution. Trevor Dunn, School Captain in 1955 was elected as the inaugural President.