

A brief history of the University Club – a personal perspective

The origins of the University Club can be traced with some accuracy to 1957 when Dr Geoff Cheeseman, newly arrived as a lecturer in chemistry, found a 'tea club' in existence on the Domain campus that he described in his memoirs as 'disgraceful'. This was when the 'Orr Case' was in full swing and staff opinion was deeply divided. There was extreme tension between academic staff and the senior University management and the Council. One of the recommendations of the ensuing Royal Commission was that the University provide suitable accommodation for the 'Senior Common Room' in the new Students Union Building on the Sandy Bay campus.

When the bulk of the university moved to Sandy Bay in 1958. Geoff Cheeseman was the prime mover in seeing that a space was provided in the newly built Student Union Building. This was in part made possible by the efforts of staff members who ran what was at the time the biggest Art Union raffle in Tasmania. The government of the day promised to match the funding and according to all accounts was embarrassed by having to contribute 25,000 Pounds. The first prize was a Ford Falcon car, and someone donated a pony; the appeal was launched by Sir Robert Menzies.

When I was appointed as lecturer in engineering in 1964 the Senior Common Room was well established in the Student Union Building but under pressure to vacate the space. Most of the lecturing staff were members and dined there regularly. It was at that time when the University Council, no doubt mindful to placate the academic staff after a decade of division, found funds to build the first part of the building now occupied by the University Club. Geoff Cheeseman was President at the time and I recall him asking me to be the secretary with the advice 'that it would not be a sinecure'. After looking up the meaning of the word and taking on the role I would have to agree with him.

One of my first tasks was to obtain a liquor license and set up a bar – beer cooler, taps, the lot. One of the licensing requirements was to install a bell by the entrance so that if ever the licencing police decided to raid, we could stop doing whatever we should not have been doing before they entered. They never did. The bar was initially a great success with Dr Alan Bray (immortalised in the eponymous room that was built during his Presidency) organising Friday night 'meetings'. Geoff Cheeseman, in his memoirs, said that he did not approve these functions as 'not being in the spirit of a Senior common room' and was relieved that they eventually discontinued.

It was about that time the Senior Common Room membership widened to include all staff of the university and was renamed the University Staff Club. Later, with postgraduate students joining, it became what it is now known as today – the University Club.

The biggest problem in the early days was finding and keeping good caterers. Providing nutritious and interesting meals at an attractive price was a challenge. The Club has been, and still is, fortunate to have been able to maintain a high standard of catering and service. Most Vice-Chancellors have supported the Club in recognition of the value to the University of the collegiality it engenders. But apart from the maintenance of the external fabric of the building (which is the University's responsibility) the Club has always been financially viable. The club has been most fortunate to enjoy the service that Christine and her 'Pickled Pear' staff have provided for the past 15 years.

The history of the University Club would not be complete without reference to Table 13.

It was started unwittingly by the late David Caro, Vice-Chancellor from 1978 to 1982. When he first came to the University he thought it would be a good way to meet staff by lunching at the University Club. David would sit at a particular table (Table 13) and anyone could join him for a chat. During the tenure of subsequent Vice-Chancellors the group that regularly dined at Table 13 acquired a reputation of keeping a close eye on how the University was being run, and made sure that one or more of the group was elected to Council. Table 13's mission statement is, *inter alia*, '*keeping the bastards honest*'. There were some not very subtle campaigns in that regard including an irreverent interpretation the University's visual identity (the lion) being used '...as a means of marking territory'. Criticism of the University's adoption of the 'Total Quality Management' philosophy drew a less than favourable response. Table 13 is proud of its motto – "Fama non taciti" – not reputed for remaining silent.

But so there is no misunderstanding, Table 13 is, as it always has been, a place where anyone in the University (apart from undergraduates) can meet, have lunch and fix the problems of the University and the World. Former Presidents include Bruce Johnson at the start of the new building; Bruce Felmingham who oversaw the vertical extension; Bob Menary and Ross Large at the time of the major refurbishments and renovation, and more recently Tony Sprent, Peter Chapman and Rob White.

From a personal perspective the wheel has turned full circle; from the time when my father, Tom Doe, became the inaugural secretary when the Senior Common Room separated from the Staff Association in 1952, through the time when I took on the same role in 1964, to my election as University Club President in 2014.

The University Club, and its predecessor, has been in existence for exactly half of the University's 125 years.

Peter Doe