



## **THE OLD CROYDONIANS – THE FIRST TWENTY- FIVE YEARS, 1911-1936**

### **INTRODUCTION**

It was not long after the first students of the School (then the Croydon Borough School) had left and become "Old Boys" that they evinced a desire for a medium by means of which they could keep in touch both with one another and also with the School. The only opportunities afforded for foregathering in the earliest days were at the annual football and cricket matches between the School and the Old Boys, commenced in 1909, and at the School's annual athletic meetings, where the programme was designed to include Old Boys' events. An important step towards providing the medium they required was taken in the Autumn of 1910, when an "Old Boys' Section" was begun in the School Magazine, "The Croydonian"; and a glance through the volumes of this magazine at the pages devoted to the activities of Old Boys shows how valuable and how much appreciated this has proved. The sketch that heads the "Old Boys' Section" first appeared in 1911, and was the work of a talented Old Boy, E. J. Harvey, whose death in 1912, at the early age of 20, was a great loss.

### **INAUGURATION**

An immediate effect of the appearance of an "Old Boys' Section" in the School Magazine was to urge on the first coterie of Old Boys to form a definite Association, and plans to further this aim were quickly put in hand. At a dinner held at the Cafe Royal, Croydon, on 11th November, 1911, (seven years after the opening of the School) following the annual Football match between the Old Boys and the School, an Old Croydonians' Association became an accomplished fact. The Headmaster of the School, A. Hillyer, Esq., B.A., was in the chair, and about forty Old Boys, together with most of the Staff of the School, were present. The best remembered incident of that inaugural dinner appears to be the rendering, in Latin, by Dr. Wright, of "Father O'Flynn." Although many of that early band of Old Boys are now scattered, a few, namely H. Lambourne, A. J. Pygram, and C. Watts, still remain active members of the Association. At that first dinner a committee was appointed to formulate rules for the Association and to arrange a future programme.

### **EARLY DAYS**

Although an Association had been formed which had as its aim the promotion of social intercourse among past students of the School, it had as yet no headquarters to serve as a meeting place for its members. This fact, however, did not deter those early enthusiasts from pressing forward with their plans, and at the first General Meeting of the Association, held on 31st March, 1912, rules for the conduct of Association were approved, and the formation of athletic, literary, and social sub-sections was authorised. The Headmaster of the School, A. Hillyer, Esq., B.A. was unanimously elected as the first President and he showed a keen interest in all the Association's activities. The social events most popular in those early years were the Annual Dinner, smoking concerts, and whist drives, the usual venue being the Cafe Royal, Croydon. Many Old Boys came forward and showed untiring energy in their labours of well and truly laying the foundations of the Association, and membership steadily increased. The annual subscription was fixed at 2/6 - "for country members outside a 15 miles radius of the School 1/-" this amount including copies of the School Magazine, "The Croydonian," which was the official organ of the Association. In the Summer of 1913 the first sports sub-section of the Association, a Swimming Club, was formed, sponsored by Mr. F. T. B. Wheeler, and



proved most successful, attaining a membership of 30 in its first season. In the Summer of 1913, also, ties and hat bands in the Association colours, red, black, and white, made their first appearance.

### **HEADQUARTERS AT THE CRESCENT**

When the School moved from Scarbrook Hill to the Crescent in the Autumn of 1913 the Governors of the School courteously granted permission for the new building to be the headquarters of the Old Croydonians' Association. This privilege was much appreciated and greatly helped to forward and strengthen the work that was being carried on. In the winter of 1913/1914 progress was accelerated, and weekly gatherings were held at the School for indoor games and social gatherings, the average attendance being about 20. A Gymnasium Class was also begun under the direction of Mr. Long, the School's gymnastic instructor.

In the Summer of 1914 Rambling and Cycling sections were added to the growing list of the Association's activities, and it was most unfortunate that, just as the work of the Association was gaining impetus, the outbreak of the Great War, in August 1914, necessarily brought a halt to its development. Among those who chiefly contributed to laying the foundations of the Association were C. G. Williams, H. F. Hughes, A. J. Pygram, H. Lambourne, and L. Holyoake. Many members of the Staff of the School also took a keen interest in the Association's work, particularly the president, Mr. Hillyer, whose advice and co-operation were invaluable in those early years. The association was also much indebted to Mrs. Hillyer for her help at social functions.

### **RESUMPTION AFTER THE WAR**

As soon as the War was over energetic measures were at once taken to revive the Association, and at a General Meeting of Old Boys, held on 7th October, 1919, with Mr. Hillyer in the Chair, there was a large attendance, all generations from 1904 to 1919 being represented. This meeting was not only an occasion for discussing the business side of the Association, but also a grand social re-union of many who had been widely separated during the eventful years that had elapsed since the gatherings of pre-war days.

The break since those days had been so complete that it was necessary to start again at the beginning, and at a Committee Meeting held on 10th October, 1919, new rules for the Association were adopted. These provided, inter alia, that the object of the Association was to promote fellowship and social intercourse among past students of the school; that the headquarters of the Association were to be at the School, The Crescent, Croydon; and that past students, past and present members of the Staff, and Governors of the School should be eligible for membership. Provision was also made in the rules for officers and a Management Committee, to control the affairs of the Association, to be elected annually at the Annual General Meeting. The annual subscription was fixed at 3/6, and "The Croydonian" was to be the official organ of the Association. These rules have been subject to amendment from time to time as occasion has arisen to meet fresh needs or varied conditions.

At the Committee meeting in October 1919, it was also resolved to print and issue membership cards to members, and to make all announcements in connection with the Association through the medium of the local press. This latter provision was later found to be impracticable, and in 1920 the practice commenced of



making announcements to each member individually by circular, which method has continued until the present time. In November, 1919, it was decided that the annual subscription could, if a member so desired,

be compounded by the payment of a Life Subscription of £2 2s. 0d. and by 1934, when the rule governing this was rescinded, the number of Life Members had reached the total of 41.

A still later resolution, at the Annual General Meeting in October 1921, fixed the amount of the subscription for "country members" at 1s. 9d.

The resuscitation of the Association after the War was marked by a happy optimism and a keen enthusiasm, evidence of which was clearly seen in the large numbers who attended the Annual Dinner, revived on 8th November, 1919, and the other social events of the 1919/1920 season. The fact that in the first year of the Association's revival membership reached 150, even without the stimulus that sports sections would have supplied had they been in operation, seemed to augur a splendid future.

The resumption of the Association's activities had, alas, found us with many gaps in our ranks, and on 27th July, 1920, a Memorial was unveiled at the School by Mrs. Wood Roberts, wife of the Chairman of the Education Committee (Councillor T. Wood Roberts) to honour the memory of "Old Croydonians" who fell in the Great War. To quote from the report of that event in the "Croydon Advertiser": "The memorial is a brass tablet, recording plain facts plainly, on the wall of the main hall behind the platform. It bears the names of one master and of 59 former pupils.

The only other inscription on the walls of the same apartment is a list of 20 "Old Croydonian" university graduates. Future scholars will not fail to note that one name is to be seen on both records. Those boys, in their short, fleeting spell of life, achieved definite honour both for their school and the Empire for which they died." A special memorial number of "The Croydonian" was published in the Autumn of 1920 devoted to the memory of these Old Boys who had "played the game" and passed on, and contained a photograph and brief biography of each.

The retirement of Mr. Hillyer in July, 1920, from the position of Headmaster of the School, and his removal from Croydon, brought to a conclusion his active part in the administration of the Association. This, however, by no means meant the cessation of his concern in the welfare of the Association and its members, and his constant and keen interest still in all our activities and his presence regularly at our Annual Dinner is greatly appreciated by all his old pupils.

At the Annual General Meeting on 6th October, 1921, W. H. Bentley, Esq., M.A., who had been appointed the new Headmaster of the School in 1921 - an appointment sincerely welcomed by all Old Croydonians - and who had been one of our vice-presidents for the previous two seasons, was unanimously elected to succeed Mr. Hillyer to the office of President of the Association. Mr. Bentley has held that position ever since and his unfailing attention in presiding over our business meetings, his regular attendance at our social functions, and the benefit of his counsel and advice, have been of the greatest assistance.



As a mark of their appreciation of his services the Association, at the Annual General Meeting on 1st October 1929, unanimously passed a resolution to the effect that "Mr. and Mrs. Bentley be elected Life Guests of the Association, such position being limited to these two members."

In 1922 "The Old School Tie" once again made its appearance. The colours were those of the Senior School at that time, red and white, but at the end of 1924 the colours adopted before the War, viz., red, black, and white once again found favour and have now become firmly established as the O.C.A. colours.

The Association has in many ways shown that its members still retain their interest in the School and its work. An instance of this was seen in 1921, when the Annual General Meeting decided that prizes to the value of £1 1s. 0d. each should be provided annually for an Old Boys' Prize and for a prize at the School Annual Athletic Sports.

Among those who were most active in the work of the Association at its revival after the War and in the years immediately following were W. H. Newman, A. T. Law, C. W. Scott, E. A. Putnam, and A. Low. Valuable help was also given by many members of the Staff, particularly W. H. Bentley, H. A. Treble, F. T. B. Wheeler, F. Hollinrake, J. Katz, and Dr. J. A. Wright.

## **FORMATION OF THE SPORTS SECTIONS**

It was the policy of the Association from the earliest days to stimulate the growth of as many sub-sections as possible within the parent body, and to try to consider and cater for all tastes. The importance of forming sports sub-sections was emphasized by Mr. F. T. B. Wheeler in a speech at the Annual Dinner in 1921, and he followed up his verbal admonition by actively interesting himself in the foundation of the Association's first sports clubs. His help in this direction was most valuable, and at an important General Meeting, held on 2nd March, 1922, he placed before the meeting the facilities available for the athletic clubs then tentatively under formation. This meeting decided that sports sections should be run as subsidiary clubs within the Association; that they should be authorised each year at the Annual General Meeting; that they should be financially self-supporting and run under the control of their own Committees; and that membership should be open to members of the Central Association only. Later, at the Annual General Meeting in 1926, the treasurers or secretaries of sub-sections were made responsible to the Central Association for the fact that members of their sections had paid their subscriptions to the Central Association.