

THE FOUNDATION OF THE UWA AMATEUR ATHLETIC CLUB

By Griff Richards,

Foundation President of the UWA Amateur Athletics Club in 1928 and 1929 and co-opted member of the committee in 1930 and 1931

Looking through the Golden Jubilee Year Book of the University of WA Amateur Athletic Club I read the historical section with particular interest -- and some surprise.

I cannot speak from personal experience of events before 1926, but from that year I was active in student affairs and in recalling the story as it unfolded I cannot say truly that the Year Book got it right.

The authors have my sympathy. It is not often that a ghost turns up from some far-off scene to upset assumptions which historians have made quite reasonably from limited data. The researchers deserve credit for the hard work they put into sifting through sketchy records and trying to fill the gaps, but I am afraid that the perilous exercise of looking for some logical sequence in student affairs has led them astray.

The fact is that the genesis of the athletics club was not, as they thought, in the context of the UWA Sports Council or of the Western Australian Amateur Athletic Association. The Sports Council had little to do with it; and the birth of the State Association was a peripheral matter, not a generating influence. We were already committed to forming our club, irrespective of what happened about the embryo association.

The context in which the club was conceived was the joyous context of St John's University Hostel, the forerunner of St George's College. A catalyst was the accumulating demands on senate, staff and students to equip themselves for the coming move to Crawley.

The official contemporary record was published by the Guild of Undergraduates in a Handbook of Information issued for the use of students at the beginning of 1929. The handbook says: "The West Australian University Athletics Club was formed in March, 1928, by Messrs. W.T.G. Richards and C. N. Cook." The preliminary steps had been taken in 1927, when the Sports Council was not, as the Jubilee Year Book surmises, "very active" in this area. It was because of a depressing state of inactivity that we got going.

It is important to note that the club was formed in the context of the times. The conditions then must be inconceivable now to students who know only Crawley.

The university was housed in an ugly huddle of wood and iron huts along the western side of Irwin Street, Perth, between Hay Street and St George's Terrace where the District Court building now stands. The huts, spartanly furnished with cheap and basic accessories, straggled along a central pathway known as Tin Pot Lane. There was no such word as campus.

In 1928 there were four faculties. Law began operating that year alongside the old faculties of Arts, Science and Engineering, these three having given the university its official colours of blue, green and gold. The total student enrolment was only 453 and there were not many with the time or

opportunity to be active in 23 clubs and societies affiliated with the Guild. Many were part-time students (that is, men and women who were already working in their chosen occupations and were attending lectures in their spare time -- a different thing altogether from students working their way through university).

Access to the university was not easy. Transport was almost entirely by tram, train or scanty bus services to the city. Scarcely any motor cars were seen at the university and very students were within walking distance. As a result, the university was deserted at night except for those who had to be there. To meet the convenience of the caretaker, whose job it was to lock up, meetings were usually held in the Vet Science hut, with its jumble of wooden tables and battered chairs, surrounded by wall diagrams of eviscerated cattle.

The caretaker, " Davy Davidson", an irreverent character with a fund of dirty stories, contributed to the education of a generation of students with his virtuosity in a school of poker which survived official disfavour as the only organised social activity in the Men's common room. This was a small hut at the Hay St end of Tin Pot lane furnished with a hat-rack, a table and some chairs.

Since 1914, the faculty of engineering had been located at Shenton House, which was the only building on the Crawley site south of the Perth- Fremantle road (as Mounts bay Road and Stirling Highway were then called) until the Engineering Hall was built in 1927. Shenton House still stands, south of the guild building. (Historically, this is a misnomer. See Appendix A.)

The isolation of the engineers was one of the impediments to maintaining club life at Irwin Street. Other factors were the small student enrolment (the total having risen from 184 in 1913 to 453 in 1928), the relatively large number of part-time students (reflected in well over half the total enrolment being in Arts), the transport difficulties, separation of the sexes in sport, except tennis, and the paucity of facilities.

Appeals for esprit de corps were a familiar refrain, but there was only one domiciled and reliable source of it -- St John's University Hostel.

The Hostel was in the western wing of the building at 204 St. George's Terrace that has been thankfully, but rather forlornly , restored as the Cloisters building. At that time, the Cloisters was the name of a boarding house which used the older (eastern) wing and supplied the Hostel with meals and housemaids. It incorporated an old house at the back, now gone, where Perth's first Anglican Bishop, Mathew Hale, started Western Australia's first secondary school in 1858.

The two wings of the building were sealed off and run separately. The Church of England, which owned the property, had for many years let the property to the boarding house keeper, but had kept direct control of the western wing. It began the State's first Clergy Training College there in 1901 and later named it St. John's College.

World War One drained St. John's of its theological students and before the end of the war university students began drifting in. This led to the Guild of Undergraduates proposing to the Senate that St. John's become a university residential college. The Church Office compromised by agreeing to give it a trial as a university hostel. The Church gave the resident students cheap board and lodging, with sparse furnishings to match, and ran the Hostel parsimoniously, but with a large measure of student autonomy.

The students at the Hostel numbered only 22, but they were a competent, high-spirited, closely-knit lot and exerted a strong influence at the university out of all proportion to their numbers. They became a focal point for extra-curricular activities. They were only ten minutes walk from Irwin Street and a call for help in student affairs never went unheeded.

The Church Office closed the Hostel abruptly in 1930 as a prelude to the opening of St. George's College in 1931. It was generally believed that the Archbishop wanted to make a clean break between the two.

This was a particularly interesting period at the university. As is well known, when Sir Winthrop Hackett, owner-editor of The West Australian and first Chancellor of the university, died in 1916 he left munificent bequests to the university for new buildings at its permanent site and to the Church of England for a residential college there. What is not generally remembered is that the bequests were far beyond his means and it came as a huge surprise to everyone ten years later when it was discovered that his executor, Sir Alfred Langler, had built up the estate enough to make Sir Winthrop's dreams come true -- with the help of managerial ingenuity and some trimming of the plans.

The university and the church were the only residuary legatees and everyone thought at the time of Sir Winthrop's death that there might not be anything left for them after direct bequests to his family and others had been met, or possibly not met. But Sir Alfred, who succeeded him as Editor and became governing director of the West Australian Newspaper Company Limited, worked so long and hard and unobtrusively, to the detriment of his health, that it came as a dramatic revelation to all concerned when in 1926, with the sale of the company to West Australian Newspapers Limited, the estate was realised and 625,000 pounds was paid to the university and the church in the prescribed proportion of three to one.

The Senate, which had been hard up since its inception, suddenly found itself in the money, though, paradoxically, under still greater strain to make ends meet. It began an exciting period of planning to build at Crawley a university worthy of its name. Despite difficulties increased by the State's transition in 1929 from centenary celebrations to economic depression, which led to a change of government in 1930 and stringent financial restrictions, the university made its major move from Irwin Street at the beginning of 1931.

In 1927 and 1928, with money from the Hackett bequest, the university laid down at Crawley the rudiments of a sports oval with a turf wicket, a practice oval and grass tennis courts at the northern end of where No. 4 car park is now, and a women's hockey ground at the Hampden Road corner where there is now a college of advanced education. The Senate left it to the students to provide any buildings or amenities they needed for the players.

The Sports Council tried in 1927 and 1928 to borrow 1,850 pounds from the Senate for building costs, but the Senate turned it down. The council then tried to raise the money by issuing debentures, but it failed through public apathy and finally the council disposed of the debentures in 1929 by allocating them to the clubs to sell. The most the Senate would do was to approve in 1928 of increased guild subscriptions for the benefit of the Sports Council to meet interest and sinking fund on the loan and other incidentals. The Senate made the council responsible for half the cost of the upkeep of the sports grounds.

While this was going on, the women using the hockey ground hid modestly behind a garage on an opposite corner of the Perth - Fremantle Road when they changed clothes. Their anguished protests move me to write in the Pelican in 1930 :-

You may sing of bays and headlands,

But my muse inclines to Nedlands,

Where hockey women go.

There enchantment clings to bowsers

On which women hang their blowses

Repressing sighs of woe

To conceal their shame from wowsers --

Ah! They little know of bowsers

Who only bowsers know.

(On the opposite corner of Hampden Road, the north-eastern corner, where the residential colleges now begin, there were a few old- style cottages set back from the road in natural scrub, and the bush extended to Kings Park. The nearest building to the east was the biology and geology building put up in 1925.)

I have no space here to go into other problems which had to be met, but have said enough to indicate in 1927 and 1928 the Sports Council was preoccupied with planning and finance. It had neither the time or inclination to think about starting an athletics club. Nor was that its business. Its executive officers (elected by the student body) had their hands full of administrative worries, and the other members of the council (two delegates from each of the established sports clubs) had enough to do in their own clubs. The Sports Council crippled itself and starved its clubs through its obligation to finance work on the sports grounds and provide buildings -- a responsibility which was especially onerous because the sports clubs were in various degrees of growth and needed financial assistance to a degree for which the council's funds were inadequate.

I mention this by way of explaining that in saying that the Athletics Club would not have been formed at that time if it had been left to the Sports Council. I do not wish to be construed as reflecting on any member of the council. It was simply not their job.

When in 1927 the YMCA Harriers' Club sent out a feeler about the possibility of starting an amateur athletics association, the Sports Council made the gesture of sending two of its members, Barney O'Connor and A. E. C. Smith, secretary of the council, to a meeting called by the Harriers, but no further action was taken.

Up to 1928, when the Athletics Club and the Women's Netball Club were formed in the first term, the only sports clubs at the university were the cricket, football, boat, rifle, tennis and women's hockey clubs. A annual sports day was the only recognition given to athletics. The Sports Council appointed two temporary secretaries to organise it, with the help of a co-opted committee.

Swimming also had only one day of the year. The council appointed an organiser to arrange an annual carnival. A swimming club was not affiliated until 1930.

When I went to the Hostel and began at the university in 1926, the sports day, held in the first term, came as something of a shock to me. The sports committee, an ad hoc group of students and lecturers, hired the WACA ground, borrowed equipment from the Public Schools Sports Association, arranged tracks as accurately as time permitted, stowed away the equipment after the meeting in a shed at the WACA from where they had taken it, and then put in a report to the Sports Council and thankfully went out of business.

The turf was uneven and the times would not be recognised these days. Starting was by means of a temperamental pistol which was the only piece of equipment the Sports Council possessed. It was mainly used by the Boat Club, which caused a crisis by losing it in 1927. If a gale helped the runners at the sports, good luck to them; it had to be a calamitous start to induce the starter to waste another cartridge; and it was like winning a lottery to draw the inside position in the 220 yards, there being no lanes on the circular track.

Despite the conditions, the competitors gave it their best shot, though the only ones who had done any training since the Christmas holidays were the few enthusiasts who had been able to exercise at home, the university having no facilities at all.

As a result, there was a picnic atmosphere that came as a letdown to freshers who had come out of school with high expectations of university students. For the general run of the men, the main event was the annual smoke social of the Men's Club. It was held on the night of the sports in a hired hall somewhere around town. The day's prizes were presented and the night usually ended in a riot fomented by rival factions, followed the next day by distressing reproaches about damage when the management surveyed the scene of the battle.

We enjoyed the same old round of fun again in 1927, but afterwards we got to talking about it at the Hostel and agreed that the university should do better, with space for a sports oval shown in the Crawley plans, it was time we had a club to put athletics on a regular basis as in other universities. Charlie Cook and I exchanged views with others during the year and got enough support to encourage us to take the plunge. We decided to make our move when the students reassembled for the 1928 academic year.

The records show that Cook and I convened a general meeting at the university on April 17, 1928, but, of course, general meetings don't just happen without a lot of preparation in advance.

In March 1928 we got busy as soon as the Hostel filled again and formed the nucleus of an athletics club committee. We had a few informal meetings there to make preliminary arrangements for the launching of the club and the following agreed to offer their services for the executive :- Cook as vice-president and captain, J.C. (Johnny) Laver as secretary, J.D. (Duff) Murray as treasurer, A.R. (Mick) Driver as vice-captain, and myself as president.

We also wanted two committee men but, since all the above were Hostel men and we needed to identify the club with the university and not merely the Hostel, we left these positions open, to be filled by a general meeting at the university. I then saw W.L.(Spoof) Southern, who was president of the Sports Council and was an ex-Hostelian, to tell him what was afoot and get his approval. I asked

him to take the chair at our general meeting and in the meantime to defer any athletics matter that might arise.

Southern gave us his blessing and Cook and I posted notices at the university convening the meeting. The only unforeseen development came when the preparations for forming a State athletics association that had been set in train by the YMCA Harriers in 1927 were carried a stage further before our meeting was held: the organisers of the embryo association invited the university to be represented at an advisory committee meeting.

Cook went along and came back with an apology. He told me he had been carried away with enthusiasm since we had formed the framework of a university club and wanted to be in the association, but overlooking the fact that our club was not yet officially alive, he had committed the university to joining the association, though he had no authority to do so.

He was worried that he had done the wrong thing, but as it turned out it did not

matter. By the time the next monthly meeting of Sports Council was held, our plans were generally known. By arrangement, to avoid loss of time, The Sports Council approved an early date for the annual sports day but instead of appointing organisers, as in the past, it made a provisional grant of 12 pounds to enable the athletics club to take over. Cook told the council that the club would join the State Association when the time came.

Our inaugural general meeting, held in the men's common room on April 17, 1928, went off well, with about 20 men present. Every position on the committee except that of President was contested, but the election of officers resulted as we had planned and the two committee places went to Alf Smith and J. B. (Barney) Campbell. Smith was the WA Rhodes Scholar for 1928 and when he went to Oxford at the end of the year the committee appointed K. W. Hatfield, a Hostel stalwart, to replace him.

In my inaugural address I said that we proposed to affiliate with the State association and asked for a good roll-up at its initial general meeting two nights later. Cook and I were appointed the club's representatives on the Sports Council and also, in June, the club's first delegates to the West Australian Amateur Athletic Association.

Our first job was to run the annual sports day. We hired the WACA ground for May 9, 1928, at the cost of two pounds two shillings (the old fashioned two guineas) plus an extra pound for the groundsman to dig a long jump pit and twelve shillings and six pence for the hire of urns for afternoon tea. The Women's Club agreed to arrange afternoon tea, for which we charged the customers sixpence each, and we also charged sixpence a head for admission to the ground. We ran a publicity campaign and distributed printed notices and invitation cards.

We had to borrow the public schools equipment again, but vowed that it would be for the last time. In earnest of the new era, we took special care with laying out the tracks accurately the day before the sports.

The cost of entry for the events was sixpence a time or two shillings and sixpence for a general entry, this being the amount of the club's annual subscription. The winners of championship events were given medals costing eight shillings and ninepence each and other place-getters were allowed one

shilling and sixpence for each point credited to them. Two points were given for a second in a championship or first in a handicap. The points winners later chose trophies in a city shop to the value of the points won.

Before the sports, the club received a letter from the Hostel challenging the University to a relay race of 1,100 yards in five legs of 220 yards each. The Hostel was the regular meeting place for the athletics club committee, five of its seven members being residents, and some of us were also members of the Hostel resident's committee. In our dual role we took up the challenge with cheers, and then five of us ran for the Hostel and won. This relay was in addition to an inter-faculty relay. (An inter-faculty competition was decided on points).

The new sense of purpose in athletics was reflected in a re-writing of the university records. By the end of 1930, only two pre-1928 records remained -- the 1924 long jump by K.L. (Leo) Cooper and the 1927 half-mile by F.W. (Fred) Simpson.

My next chore was to compose a constitution for the club. I wrote it on conventional lines. My main problem was to decide whether the name should be athletic club or athletics club. I plumped for athletics club, though in popular usage the "s" seems to have been dropped more often than not. For our colours we chose a white singlet with blue, green and gold facings.

During 1928 we entered teams in WAAA competitions, winning the only event for which points were awarded, an 880 yards championship relay race, and were pleased with the showing of our entrants made in the State championships.

Further field activities were prevented by the lack of grounds of our own, so we began planning ahead for 1929, Cook and I agreeing to continue in office. We wanted to organise a continuous series of activities and we appointed a committee of two to arrange a programme and timetables.

Cook was a tower of strength, especially in the field, but he was teaching full time and did not have much time to spare outside his work and lectures and studies and meetings and commuting, so I found myself fingered by implacable fate to expiate my sins in hard labour. I hope that explains the personal pronoun in what follows. As well as being President, I had to double up at times as secretary and treasurer, more particularly during and after long vacations.

Anxious to get into inter-varsity athletics and to get our own tracks and materials as soon as possible, I made inquiries interstate and locally during the long vacation and to save time called a special meeting of the committee at the Hostel in February 1929 before the academic year opened. We planned to enter a team in the annual inter-varsity meeting to be held in Brisbane in May 1929, but I could not persuade the Railway Department to give us concession fares. Reluctantly, we had to forgo the trip because the costs were prohibitive and the athletes would have to sit up for three days and nights in the trains to Brisbane, in the absence of sleepers.

We also had a disappointment with the Crawley oval. I engaged a surveyor named George Nunn (father of 1931 Club President W. M.(Bob) Nunn) and under his direction laid out a track with the help of two volunteers from the Hostel, Duff Murray and O.F. (Otto) Fry. Unfortunately, the shape of the oval designed by the architects did not allow for a good 220 yards track, so we had to arrange for an extension to the east. Another problem was that all the topsoil had been removed from the

north of the oval when the ground was cleared by the builders. We found it very hard to grow grass on the poor sandy subsoil that was left.

Because of this, no running on the oval could be considered until at least the third term of 1929. We deferred the sports day till then in the hope of holding it at Crawley, but the oval did not improve in the winter, so we arranged to hold the sports at the WACA.

Even though we could charge for admission to the WACA, whereas we could not at Crawley, there was clearly trouble ahead in financing a meeting at the WACA, the club's treasury being even more bare than Crawley oval after we had bought some equipment. I saw Professor Whitfield, the vice-chancellor, to ask whether the university would pay for a band to help entertain the crowd we hoped to attract with a publicity drive. However the vice-chancellor was a hard man. He said no.

When the spring brought a showing of green at Crawley, with some grass among the weeds, I was able to announce at a committee meeting toward the end of September that after inspecting the oval with other committee members I had cancelled the booking for the WACA. We decided to hold the sports day at Crawley on Saturday, October 19 and to lay out the oval so that heats could be run there on the previous Sunday.

The laying out of the oval gave me a day to remember. None of the people who had promised to help turned up, so I had to do it on my own, crawling around with a tape measure and pegs in an effort to make the tracks accurate to the inch.

I got professorial approval for the use of the Engineering Hall for afternoon tea, but agreed to pay one pound for the cleaning of the hall afterwards. I also asked the Government Tramway Department to run a special tram on the Saturday from the Weld Club in Perth to Crawley. Scarcely anyone at university had the use of a car. (See Appendix B.)

The 1929 sports day was the first of our full scale championship meetings. We modelled it on the lines of the inter-university programme of track and field events. This was a notable turning point. We had been lucky to get the help of two medical graduates who had returned to Perth and were fine exponents of field events -- Leslie Le Souef and Hamish McMillan. This was long before our own faculty of medicine opened for lectures in 1957. Our medical students usually went to Melbourne or Adelaide after doing first year science in Perth.

First Le Souef and then McMillan joined us at the Hostel and the Esplanade nearby, at the foot of Mill Street, in their spare time to teach us how to put the shot and throw the discus and we got other help for the pole vault.

Le Souef continued to help us by officiating at athletics meetings. McMillan, who had been inter- varsity shot put champion, kept in training and won the State championship in 1929, and again in 1930, breaking his own record. Our club champion, H.B.(Harry) Wilson, who won the State and university discus throw titles in both years, shattering his own records in 1930, and he won the university shot put in both years, setting the inaugural record in 1929. He was succeeded as shot put record holder by F. J. (Frank) Drew. They both went on to represent Australia in the 1938 British Empire Games.

The 1929 sports day was notable in that it was the first in which we used our own equipment. How we got it when we were broke is a story in itself. Early in the first term, with shot put tuition on tap but without a shot, we spread ourselves to buy a 16 pound

shot. Then I went to Tom Outridge and Alan Evans, two of the State's leading sportsmen, who had opened a shop in a lane off central Hay Street, and persuaded them to let us have equipment on credit.

Their first quote was 42 pounds and four shillings, but I got them down to 25 pounds by cutting out the hurdles. Sad to say, I came under fire from some of the women at the next guild election for having got the club into debt, this being seen as something shocking. However we were desperate for equipment of our own and the only way to get it was to buy first and try to raise the money later.

This we tried to do in every way we could, but it was only one of our problems and we were not able to make much headway financially. We managed to scrounge 25 pounds from the Sports Council in September 1929 and used it to buy some of the things we wanted. Outridge and Evans were very patient and understanding, but 19 pounds, five shillings and five pence was still outstanding in June 1930, so when they asked for the money, not having too much themselves as the Depression began to bite, the club managed to clear the debt.

Perhaps the most notable feature of the 1929 sports day was that women's events were included for the first time. I saw the secretary of the Women's Club and we agreed, after consulting our committees, that the women's events would be 50, 100 and 220 yards championships, a 75 yards handicap and an inter-faculty relay race of 200 yards in four legs of 50 yards.

Miss Elsie Tolerton made a clean sweep of the championships; and then in 1930, when the broad jump and the hop, step and jump were added to the women's championships and the handicap was cut out, Miss Tolerton won every event on the programme, with a new or inaugural record in each of them. She was also in the Arts women's relay team, which won in record time. Miss E Humphries was another good performer, but she had to be content with seconds to Miss Tolerton.

In the 1929 sports, the women athletes ran in the standard costume of long stockings, petticoats and whatever underclothing and whatnots were dictated by decorum. But in 1930 the scene was transformed. Spectators and competitors alike were inspired when the women athletes turned out in what an admirer described as "little short rammies".

Our committee recognised Miss Tolerton's remarkable efforts in 1929 by recommending her for a half blue, but it could not be more than a gesture because, as was explained in a letter to her, the rules provided that no such award could be made to anyone who was not a member of a club.

This information brought a predictable reaction from the woman, with the men in full sympathy. At the next annual general meeting of the club, on April 7, 1930, it was decided to admit women to membership, the incoming President commenting rather ungallantly that there would be "several advantages, chiefly financial". The constitution was amended in May to pave the way for a committee meeting on June 18 that was attended by woman members for the first time -- Misses D. Pearson, E Tolerton and C. Jackson.

I have laid stress on the 1929 sports day because of its historical significance (there were also minor changes, such as introducing cups for championship winners, reducing the number of handicaps, revising the points system and increasing the negotiable value of each point from one shilling and sixpence to two shillings and sixpence). It was the culmination of our first full year of field activities after the groundwork had been laid in 1928.

Besides taking part in all WAAAA activities in 1929, including a special mile medley relay race, we challenged other bodies to competitions on their own grounds, ours not being ready, and also ran in the Fremantle to Perth relay, held our own paper chases on Sunday mornings and arranged training on the Esplanade at the foot of Mill Street.

This was decades before a lot of the river was reclaimed for the Narrows Bridge and Narrows Interchange. At that time, the river front between William and Mill Streets was filled untidily by an amusement ground called White City and boat sheds and workshops, but west of Mill Street the river swept inwards and curved around to the Narrows not far from the line of trees fringing Mounts Bay Road. Between the trees and the water stretched a strip of lawn which we found useful for training, though amorous couples made the going hazardous at night when we made sorties from the Hostel.

An eventful year led to our making a good showing in the 1929 State championships. We were strongly behind the WAAAA and to help it along I started a weekly column of athletics notes in the West Australian. Colours awards were a continuing problem. A committee meeting on June 12 (one that I missed) made the club's first recommendation to the Sports council.

Blues: C.W.Cook, J Haire

Blazers T Rodrigues, G Bourne, E. Budd, E. Lambert, A Driver,

G Richards, B Campbell, W. Hudson.

The list was cut severely by a niggardly committee of the Sports Council. Haire was the only athletics blue it approved. Cook had the wait another year. The athletics club committee had taken the view that the winners of all championship events at the annual sports should be awarded colours. I was not happy about this , believing that only performances at or near inter-university standards should count.

There was the difficulty that our isolation and chronic lack of funds prevented us from competing interstate, so I wrote to other university clubs for data and worked out a new and enlarged list of standard times and distances on which to base colours recommendations conforming to intervarsity levels. Our club committee adopted the list and in mid-1929 appointed a standing sub-committee headed by Cook to keep it under review.

From the beginning, the UWA colours awards had been clouded by uncertainty. The first awards were made in 1923 by the individual sports clubs. The Sports Council then took charge and from 1924 controlled all awards. It ruled that they should not be made retrospectively but it did not lay down any clear guidelines for new awards.

The original blazer awards honoured people chosen to represent the university in first teams, in the same way that school blazer pockets were awarded, but as sporting activities grew in the next few years the awards became more selective, representing merit at a high level of achievement though not necessarily measured by intervarsity standards.

Blues were introduced in 1927 in the glow of our first victory in the intervarsity boat race for the Oxford and Cambridge Cup. There was no doubt about that standard or its claim to recognition in the highest form. When the conquering heroes returned to Perth, by train, a crowd of students hoisted them into a cab borrowed from the rank of horse-drawn cabs outside the central railway station and, releasing the unenthusiastic horse, drew the cab in a procession along Wellington Street, preceded by four reverent students carrying a coffin-like box containing the cup. The editor of The West Australian, Dudley Disraeli Braham, who had played a prominent part in the founding of the boat club, was the father of one of the oarsmen and now, unlike the horse, was full of joy. He sent a photographer to perpetuate the epochal scene in a picture in the paper.

The 1927 Sports Council decided that the oarsmen should have blues, which would carry the distinction of a blue blazer edged with braid in the university colours and bearing the university crest and sports symbols on the pocket. The old blazer was a gorgeous creation of vertical stripes in the university colours, with the university crest and sports symbols on the pocket.

The existence of the two blazers side by side led to confusion about the status of the old blazer, some of the wearers of which were undoubtedly top performers. To end the confusion, the 1927 Sports Council graded its latest awards in two categories. It awarded blues for 1926 and 1927 to those in the top category and on October, 1927, listed them in its minutes.

The 1928 council decided to introduce half-blues to cater for those in the second category and at the same time to discontinue the old blazer, but there was no question of invalidating the previous awards. The design of the old blazer was retained for the half blue with the addition of braid in the university colours superimposed on the cuffs and the pocket – a simple transition to minimize costs.

After a full scale review to stabilize the colours system, the Sports Council decided in November 1928 that, beginning in 1929, it would appoint a colours committee of five members; that this committee would be the final authority for awards; that blues should be awarded for major sports only, the major sports being cricket, football, rowing, athletics, shooting, tennis and women's hockey; and that the sports clubs would send their recommendations to the colours committee, which would have the power to accept or reject and would report to the Sports Council its list of approvals.

These resolutions were codified in amendments to the council's constitution on December 14, 1928, and were put into practice with the appointment of the inaugural

colours committee (Miss D Carroll and Messrs. K. Hatfield, J. Paul, G. Richards, H Reilly) on April 10, 1929.

The Sports Council launched the colours committee in 1929 with a definitive statement about blues and half blues. It said :- “ Both are preferably gained by participation in an intervarsity contest, but in a year where a contest is not held in any particular sport they are awarded on performances in local

contests. The blue is awarded for outstanding performances. The half blue is given where the standard of achievement is not so high but worthy of recognition.

Blues approved by the Sports Council were to continue from those recognised in its minutes of October 11, 1927; the old blazer would denote colours other than blues awarded up to 1928; and half blues would be the colours other than blues awarded from 1928 onwards. The council kept an Honours Book and a duplicate was held in the university library. Where are they now?

The inaugural colours committee gave the new system a generally acceptable start, but the next committee, in 1930, came under fire from the clubs for being too high handed. The athletics club in particular charged it with treating club recommendations with contempt. Feeling against the colours committee became so heated that the Sports Committee instructed it to reconsider its 1930 report and present it to a special meeting of the council in March 1931.

But in its revised report the colours committee slashed from 13 to 3 the awards recommended by the athletics club. This fuelled the sense of outrage of Ralph (Onkus) Honner, who had succeeded me as President. He protested that the athletics club had not been fairly treated. A fiery discussion followed, but he could not get the numbers to turn down the report. Honner told the athletics club committee when it met the next night that, contrary to what had been laid down in 1929 and reiterated by Harry Wilson, secretary of the Sports Council, towards the end of 1930, the colours committee had decided the awards solely on performances in State championships and it had not considered the splendid form shown in inter-club competition.

This gave rise to great indignation in the athletics committee and it decided that the matter should be taken further by the 1931 committee to be elected by the annual general meeting in the following week.

The argument ended with the colours committee conceding the point and recommending to the Sports Council that " a blue shall be awarded for outstanding performances either in inter-varsity sport or first class sport in this State". The council adopted the recommendation in April 1931.

In the meantime, the 1930 Sports Council had inadvertently laid another egg. The president of the council, H.C. (Nugget) Coombs, drew attention to it in the Pelican of December 12, 1930. " With the award system fairly on its feet," he wrote, " only one change was made this year. It was decided that old blue or colours awards be considered equal to the new half blue. This will entitle holders of such awards to

purchase the half blue in place of their old blazers , which are now difficult to procure".

He took the reference from a Sports Council decision made on August 6, 1930, on the recommendation of the controversial colours committee of that year " that old colours awards be made equivalent to the modern half blue". Its intention was generally seen at the time to be limited to the exigencies of the wardrobe, but taken literally the wording could be given a much wider meaning, as shown by Coomb's gratuitous insertion of the word " blue".

The lack of definition bred uncertainty over the years, finishing with an arbitrary Sports Council resolution on October 5, 1977, "that Sports Council recognise only those colours, namely blues and

half blues, awarded after 27 November 1928, but duly noting that other awards were made prior to 27 November 1928”.

This seems to disqualify some of our greatest achievers, including the oarsmen who won the 1927 intervarsity eight oar championship, beginning a winning streak of three victories in the four years to 1930, when the race was rowed on the Swan River for the first time and rapturous celebrations followed, helped by the original Steve, who gave us the run of the bar without allowing such crudity to spoil the fun.

Admittedly, some of the written records are incomplete. But the lines were clearly drawn in 1927 and 1928. Half a century later it should not have been possible to unfrock retrospectively the blues that were listed in the Sports Council minutes of October 11, 1927 after a thorough review of performances on the basis of intervarsity standards. Though the personal element has been almost (but not entirely, as yet) eliminated by effluxion of time, the principle remains.

The athletics club did not get around to consolidating a list of its blues until 1947, when the committee turned back the clock and for the first time in the annals of the club recorded a blue awarded to Fred Simpson in 1927 – a year before the club came into existence.

The club’s list thus begins with a seeming anomaly, but thanks to a diligent secretary it gives due recognition to a fine athlete. Now widely known as the donor of the Simpson Medal in league football, he came from Guildford Grammar School highly regarded as a distance runner. At the university, he won the 880 yards and mile championships in record times and, surprisingly, won the 100 yards as well, as a freshman, at the 1927 sports day before going away next year for a medical course. A compulsive runner, Simpson was propelled by intense nervous energy. One day when he arrived at Irwin Street from Mt Lawley in a mild sweat he explained that he did not have time to wait for a tram, so he ran.

His blue was recommended in the course of the temporary committee’s report on the annual sports day that was received by the Sports Council in June 1927. The council approved the report without discussion.

In running the mile in 4 min. 51.6 sec, Simpson had beaten the standard time by 3.4 sec. Oddly enough, though his time for the 880 yards, 2 min. 7.6 sec, was outside the standard time of 2 min. 7 sec, it stood as a record a few years longer than his mile record did.

The earliest blues which the athletics club recommended successfully after it was formed in 1928 were :

1928 : J. Haire

1929 : C. N. Cook and G Bourne

1931 : H. B. Wilson

The 1930 gap was caused by a delay in the Sports council after Wilson had been recommended with others in 1930. As mentioned above, the delay arose from the row about the colours committee that led to the 1930 report being referred back to it and then presented to it in a revised form in 1931. This created a pattern of awards at the beginning of a year for performances in the previous year.

The same procedure was followed with subsequent awards. Note that my list of blues is slightly different from the athletics club's list, which puts Bourne in 1930, and differs also from the Sports Council minutes, which put Cook in 1928. This must have been a secretarial slip.

The first blues given to women athletes were the 1940 awards to Miss M. Graham and Miss B. Judge, but the first colours award was a half blue to Miss E. Tolerton in 1931 after the club's 1930 committee had strongly but unsuccessfully recommended her as worthy of a blue.

All the early winners thoroughly deserved their awards. In any evaluation of their performances it should be remembered that the conditions were very rough. The university oval was still under criticism in mid-1930 as a "bald, hump-backed excrescence" (to quote from the Pelican) without even a shed for a change room. As facilities improved, the whole record book was re-written between 1932 and 1935.

Jerry Haire, the first blue chosen by the club, was an uncommonly versatile athlete. Unlike the rest of us, who played any game that was going, he devoted himself to athletics and could run or jump with the best of them in any event on the programme. He figured in some interesting results in 1930. He tied with Bill Buckley in the high jump in the university championships and then the two of them tied again in the State championships. Buckley won the jump-off at the university and Haire won the jump-off for the State title, at a height the same as the new university record credited to both of them.

In the same State championships, Haire tied for first in the 120 yards hurdles. In the run-off he was beaten for the title by John (Bluey) Burt, the State record-holder. Haire's time was faster than a new university record which had been set by Jim Espie.

Charlie Cook was our sprint king, making and breaking records for several years. Short and stocky, he had powerful thighs and a long stride and, beautifully balanced, was a pleasure to watch.

Geoff Bourne was a champion miler. He usually went to the front early and learnt to pace himself to perfection. His father would wait for him at the top of the finishing straight to coax him home when the rest of the field were too far behind to push him.

Bourne held the university and State mile titles for three years, I think. He created a new State record of 4 min. 39.6 sec in 1929, but had to wait until his third attempt in 1930 before he could beat Fred Simpson's university record of 4 min. 51.6 sec. and even then Bourne's time was 7.2 seconds slower than his State record – an indication of the state of the university oval. Leederville Oval, where the State mile was run, was grassed but by no means a fast track by today's standards.

Bourne's father was a great supporter of our club. We made him an honorary life member in 1931. It was to recognise his efforts that life memberships were introduced, at my suggestion, in that year. In retrospect, I wonder if it was wise, consistency being unattainable and oversights inevitable as students come and go.

Harry Wilson, the 1931 blue, was a giant of a man. He was 20 feet ahead of the best of other competitors in the discus throw at both State and university level and did well to come second to

Hamish McMillan in the State shot put. He had a remarkable turn of speed for a big man. He tied with Cook in the university 220 yards championship in 1930 and also won the 440 yards championship.

In 1930 I resigned as President because I wanted to start a student newspaper, the Pelican, and knew it would take a lot of my time. I handed over to Ralph Honner as president and Jerry Haire became secretary. The club was lucky to have them. They did a tremendous work at a critical time, taking the club to a big win in the Sandover Cup and a total of 146 points out of a possible 206 in inter-club events. It was the outstanding club in the State championships. Our main intra-club events that year, apart from the annual championships, were Sunday morning events on the Esplanade for men and women.

When I was co-opted to the committee in 1930, Mick Driver was still there as vice-captain. When I was co-opted to the committee again in 1931, with W.M. (Bob) Nunn as president, Driver was gone and I was the only original left.

Appendix A.

As mentioned in page 2, Shenton House is, historically, a misnomer for the old building on the university campus that housed the faculty of engineering from 1914.

The original owner, Henry C. Sutherland, called it Crawley House. It still carried that name when the university acquired it.

Sutherland, with his wife Ann, was among the officials for the Swan River Colony who arrived with Captain James Stirling, Lieutenant-Governor, in the *Parmelia* on June 2, 1829. Sutherland came as Assistant Surveyor and rose through the service to become Colonial Treasurer.

Also among the original officials in the *Parmelia* was Captain Mark Currie, R.N. who had been appointed Harbour Master. In October 1829, he and his wife Jane took up a villa grant of 32 acres, Swan Location 87 on Matilda Bay. After they fenced the property and built a small rush cottage, they decided to return to England and in 1832 sold the property to Sutherland for 200 pounds. Sutherland named it Crawley Park after his mother, whose maiden name was Ann Crawley.

Sutherland built the two-storey Crawley House between 1834 and 1837 and made additions in 1852, a year after he married Frances Bussell, of Cattle Chosen, his first wife Ann having died in 1850.

After he died, his family leased Crawley House to Fred Barlee, the Colonial Secretary, from 1856 to 1867, after which Susan Whitfield (nee Sutherland) and her husband Edward lived there.

Sir George Shenton, one of Perth's leading citizens, brought the property in 1875. After he died in 1909, the government resumed it from his executors in 1910, paying 15,000 pounds for it. By then Crawley Park had grown to 152 acres. The Government reserved 48 acres on Matilda Bay as a public park and in 1912 offered 104 acres to the embryo university.

After a long argument about whether this would be the best place for a permanent site, the university accepted the offer in 1921. In 1922 it received a 999 year lease of the Crawley estate and surrounding land totalling 168½ acres in exchange for endowment land elsewhere valued at 15,867 pounds – a rare bargain.

In the meantime, after the temporary buildings in Irwin Street, Perth, had opened for lectures in 1913, the Government allowed the engineering school to occupy Crawley House from 1914. The old homestead thus became the first of the Crawley buildings of UWA, which later restored it.

Though the university retained the name Crawley House in official papers, many people had settled into the habit of identifying it as Shenton's house, or place, or villa, or homestead. This led the senate in the jubilee year 1963 to settle the matter by adopting the name Shenton House as the official designation.

The decision turned a general description into a proper name, giving a final twist to a mutation which had grown out of popular usage. But the senate's stamp of authority did not carry the authentic stamp of history.

Appendix B

Scarcely anyone at the university had the use of a car in 1929. Trams were the main form of transport.

There were two tramlines connecting Nedlands with Perth. One, opened in 1915 after the newly built Crawley Baths had proved a success, supported a Government promise that if the university went to Crawley it would have a tram service around the river to Perth. Trams ran from Barrack Street along the Esplanade, Bazaar Terrace and the Perth-Fremantle Road, which began at Mill Street. The tramline eventually extended to Bay View Terrace, Claremont, and then the trams were superseded by trolley buses.

Another tram service, connecting Nedlands with Subiaco, had been opened in 1909, a month after the Nedlands Baths was opened in April. It went by way of Broadway, Hampden Road and Thomas Street to connect with a tramline along Rokeby Road and Hay Street to the city. There was no Winthrop Avenue, which was the name given later to what had been an ordinary street called Ferdinand Street, widened and improved to connect with Thomas Street, which was itself widened with a strip taken from Kings Park after a campaign led by The West Australian.

Prepared by Griff Richards 24 September 1990.