

# THE NEWMAN CLUB

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## INAUGURAL DINNER AND MEETING

*The Melbourne Zoo Restaurant, 29 April 1980*

*Present:* Noel Newman, John Newman, Robert Beggs, Jock Bing, Charles Fairbairn-Calvert, Len Carlton, Michael Cavanaugh, Tony Cavanaugh, Robert Craig, Sir James Darling, Philip de Fégely, Michael Fraser, Sandy Gilbert, Dennis Godfrey, Bruce Harvey, Sam Hayward, David Kemp, Chester Kernot, Andrew Kirkwood, John Landy, Garth Manton, Roger Newman, David Page, Boz Parsons, Bill Ramsay, Tony Robinson, Harry Rundle, Noel Rundle, Philip Russell, Paul Sheahan, Julian Simpson, Deryck Stevens, Lindsay Wakefield, Ian Wilson, Jim Winchester.

The inaugural meeting of the Newman Club — the School's football support-club — was held at the restaurant in the Melbourne Zoo. (It was mooted by anti-football protagonists that the venue was a most appropriate one!) A seafood soup preceded a fillet of beef, both of which were washed down with copious quantities of locally-produced wine, and the most clever choice of a palate-cleansing, head-clearing, fruit-salad was followed by the traditional coffee and mints.

Michael Cavanaugh, the motive force behind the formation of the club and the convenor of the evening, welcomed the guests and proceeded to amaze the audience by relating the highlights of his football career at Corio; it seemed that they were matched only by his prowess as a goal-umpire! Readers can judge for themselves the standard of football that he played by the fact that most of it took place on Kow Flat. His humour, however, set the pattern for a very convivial evening.

Noel Newman, the co-patron of the club, tip-toed delightfully through some of the history of Geelong Grammar School football and told us of the close relationship between Geelong Grammar School football, the city of Geelong, and indeed the Geelong Football Club, in the early part of this century — the three being inextricably tied.\* John Newman, the other half of the patronage, spoke eloquently on behalf of football and the School, putting the lie to the popularly-held belief that all V.F.L. footballers are monosyllabic nincompoops.

Likening himself to the Italian dictator of the 'thirties, Michael Cavanaugh produced the Club, the tie, the President, and the Secretary-Treasurer, lock-stock-and-barrel, as a *fait accompli* — much to the amusement of all and to the relief of those who dislike protracted discussions.

In consequence Noel Rundle was elected as the inaugural President, and he spoke firmly and decisively about his desire to see that the Newman Club should worthily support the School's footballing activity. Paul Sheahan, the Master-in-Charge of Football at Corio, was elected Secretary-Treasurer but, much to the relief of the guests and himself alike, was not proffered as a speaker. The design for a tie was adopted — when the gag was applied before discussion had been entered into! — and is in keeping with that for the Tunbridge Club.

A legendary figure in the School's history, Sir James Darling, stated that his initial reaction to our esoteric brand of winter sport was one of horror and non-comprehension, but that he had grown to respect the underlying principles involved in any sport, and added that Australian Rules football had the added advantage of being one of the most thrilling spectacles in the world.

Boz Parsons, the Senior Master at Corio, and Bill Ramsay, the President of The Old Geelong Grammarians, gave their personal support and assured us of the support of their organizations.

There was a slight arrest to the general air of conviviality when one particular member questioned the executive about the aims, objectives, and *modus operandi* of the Club; but with great political skill the President deferred a definitive statement until a General Meeting had been held to thrash out ideas.

The newly-elected President declared the meeting closed soon after 10.50 p.m., with a firm expression of hope, nay expectation, that no effort would be spared in the search for a premiership. No date was fixed for the next meeting.

\* The text of F.N.B.N.'s speech is printed below.

A. P. S.

## SPEECH BY NOEL NEWMAN



In order to get some idea of the importance of the formation of such a Club as this, I think it is necessary to go back to the start of Australian Rules Football, and see where the School fitted into it all and the major part it played in the life of Geelong at that time and the esteem in which it was held by the people then. We can then see where we have got to now and what we may be able to do about it for the benefit of football in the School in the future.

Some of you may have seen on the wall of the M.C.G., near the Members' Entrance, a plaque which states that Australian Rules Footy was founded near that ground — in the early 1860s, I think — in a match played between Melbourne Grammar School and Scotch College just about where the Jolimont Railway Yards are now situated. The first games seem to have been a mixture of Gaelic Football, Rugby, and a few local additions. The ground was of considerable length with no boundaries: goal-posts but no behind-posts: the teams consisted of upwards of forty players a side: there were no umpires: the two captains were to be the sole judges of unfair play, and to award free kicks when necessary. The first game started after lunch and play continued the whole afternoon, but as neither side had scored after some hours it was decided to continue the match the following afternoon — but with the same result. It was therefore decided that the game would be much improved by having some rules, an umpire, fewer players, a shorter ground, etc.; and so Australian Rules Football came into being.

The School soon joined these arrangements, starting in 1868 with A.C. Brewer as Captain. At first any piece of ground was suitable and the first matches were played in the vicinity of the Cummin Na Feinne Hotel in Kilgour Street. In those days, all sports and sporting activities met and had their headquarters at hotels — racing, rowing, cricket, shooting, etc. — and even the Town Council was not above meeting at an inn, as the early editions of the *Geelong Advertiser* show. Sport, social life, and hotels all seemed to go together: there were literally hundreds of hotels and two breweries — Volum's and Hodges Bros — for a population of about 20,000.

Throughout the 1870s, the Argyle Ground was the scene of all School matches (the Argyle Hotel still stands in Aberdeen Street), and the ground was bounded by Aberdeen, Pakington, and Villamanta Streets. The one exception to all this was in 1878, when the School played two successive draws in the one season with Geelong College and, at the request of the townspeople, backed by the Town Council, a third match was arranged to be played on a neutral ground — the Corio Oval, the headquarters of the Geelong Football Club. This match also resulted in a draw. This request by the townspeople for a third match indicates the interest which the people took in the schools — and, for their part, the interest the schools took in the social and sporting life of the town: something that is sadly missing now. The School built up a tremendous football reputation between 1875 and 1907, and quite often Scotch, Wesley, and St Patrick's refused to play us, though in every instance we challenged them to play. An interesting point to note here is that from the very start (except for one year when the Headmasters cancelled all Public School sport) there has not been one miss in our matches with Melbourne Grammar School from 1875 to the present day.

Those of you who used to see the photos of the football teams on the walls of C.R.2 at Corio and later in the Archives at the School would have been struck by both the uniforms of the teams and the glorious beards and



moustaches of the players. It must be remembered, however, that in those days they stayed at School far longer than at present, and when I first came to Corio as a boy you had to be under twenty-one to play in a P. S. team, and I well remember in 1929, as a master, coaching a boy to pass Intermediate Geography though he was too old to play in the 1st XI.

In the last decades of the nineteenth century Public School matches were played on public grounds — Corio Oval was the final shift from the Argyle ground on weekdays — and on Saturdays G.G.S. and G.C. "students" formed the bulk of the Geelong League Team. Those of you who have *Barwon Ballads* by J.L. Cuthbertson will recall his poem — five pages of it — "Carlton v. Geelong: Dedicated to the Ever Victorious Twenty, 1879". In it he names twelve of the School who played in that match: Gardiner (captain), Stiffe, Watson, Sandie, Wilson, Douglass, Christey, Watt, Fairbairn, Goer, Gunn, and Rickards. To emphasize the importance of the School in the life of the town, there were 10,000 present at the game out of a total population of 22,000.

I suppose the next thing of some importance was the one and only Champion team of 1902. This team defeated Scotch 12-18 to 5-4, Melbourne Grammar 17-10 to 3-10, Wesley 3-10 to 2-4, Xavier 25-20 to 3-2, and College twice — 227 points to 19 points. In all, the team scored 642 points and had 117 points kicked against it. This team was coached by A. Morris — Jarps — who inhabited C.R.2 at Corio. When I first joined the Staff in 1929, I was talking to him in the Common Room one day and asked him what it was like coaching the only Champion School team. For the one and only time in my life, I saw him guffaw. "Newman," he said, "I was not a coach but a kelpie heeler. These were men who knew far more about football than I ever knew, and all I had to do was to get them to the ground on time, and then get them back after the match to School and Roll Call. You must remember that in those days there were no cars nor trams: the only way to get to the ground was by cab or to walk. It was easy enough to get them to the Oval to play, but these were men, remember, who had just played a hard game of football, and on the way back had to pass two hotels (both still standing today), the Elephant and Castle and the Cummin Na Feinne. That's why I called myself a heeler: I rounded them up and used to get them back to School for Tea and Roll Call."

Since then we have been near a premiership once or twice — 1924 was one example — without ever quite cracking it, but right down to when I played for the School all P.S. matches were still played on weekdays and still on either the M.C.G. or the Corio Oval. They were still social events — particularly the Geelong College game — when even the girls' schools got half-holidays, but soon after this the Headmasters changed not only the age at which people could play, but changed to school grounds and Saturday matches.

In the last few years, I have become interested again in School football, as I've got grandsons and grandnephews at Corio, and I've been struck on the whole by the weakness of some teams and the competition football has from a variety of other activities. This year, I understand, Perry House has about twenty-seven boys opting to play Australian Rules out of a total of about seventy in the House. This leads me to the point I want to make about the usefulness of a Club such as you are establishing tonight. It is not much good talking about giving money or equipment for people to use if there are not enough to use it. What I think we have got to do is to help revive interest and enthusiasm in the sport, and get boys to enjoy playing what we think is the best sport of all. Please talk to them, encourage them, if you have sons take



them to football matches, explain the rules to them, show them how to mark and kick, and take an interest in their progress. If you do any or all of these things, this Club will not have been founded in vain. And, finally, if you are married and your wife thinks it is too dangerous a game for her son to play, give her the words of Banjo Patterson (I think it was), who wrote:

Never a game was worth a rap  
For a rational man to play,  
Into which no misfortune or no mishap  
Could possibly find its way.

(*Note.* For the purpose of simplicity, I have from the start referred to the game as Australian Rules, when in fact it originated as the "Victorian Game of Football". I have also referred to the competition as the Victorian League, when in fact it started as the Victorian Football Association, which same continues today in a somewhat minor role. In the 1890s a number of Clubs broke away from the V.F.A. to form the V.F.L., Essendon and Geelong among them. The last two Association Clubs to transfer were Footscray and North Melbourne, at a much later date, whilst the University Team withdrew from the League after the First World War.)