

The aims of that early gathering embraced two essential elements – Our beloved alma mater, Wesley College and a common purpose – Fellowship; which to this day form the hub around which our Constitution is based. Little did they realize that the O.B.U. they were about to form would still be in existence twenty five years later and that it would motivate Old Wesleyites across the world to form similar groups in their own countries.

The O.B.U. adopted the title – “O.B.U. Australia Branch” as Melbourne had a significantly larger population of Sri Lankans than any other State in Australia. True to the spirit of its charter, the OBU Australia Branch aims were:

1. To unite in one fraternal band.
2. To afford an opportunity of bringing together past and present pupils of Wesley College.
3. To assist in meeting the needs of the College as necessary.
4. To preserve the honour and dignity of the College.

The Foundation Committee comprised:

President:	Cecil d’With-Barbut
Vice President:	Gerald de Zilwa
Secretary:	Keith de Kretser
Treasurer:	Nelson de Silva
Social Secretary:	Rodney de Kretser
Asst. Social Secretary:	Upali Perera

It was decided that future meetings would be open to all Old Wesleyites. The frequency of meetings was to be determined. The inaugural meeting was a success and we agreed to meet again and spread the word to as many Old Boys.

As the word spread more Old Wesleyites showed up at the meetings. How can one forget the late Ronnie Campbell who would come in his sarong to the meetings and do his Ranis impersonations and talk about the “Kityakara days”. It was truly a nostalgic journey down memory lane that proved to be a regular feature whenever “*the past and present*” met.

Plans were made to host Mr & Mrs Cedric Oorloff at a Dinner Dance on 1 February 1980. The excitement and anticipation was building up and for a while there were doubts on whether the function would go ahead. The State of Victoria was in the throes of regular industrial disputes with the Electricity Workers Union, and there were frequent blackouts enforced by the Government to manage the crisis. It so happened that power blackouts were to affect our function from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.. What could we do? The band needed power. The significance of the occasion

dictated that we had to proceed. David Schokman lent us a generator which provided the power for the band. Neville Ludowyke had a collection of empty beer bottles that after a quick clean and wash served as candle stands. The ambience of the room was fabulous with the two blues featuring prominently with bunches of balloons and the napkins on the table complimented by the subtle hues of the flickering flames from over 100 candles. The evening got off to a great start and power blackout aside, the fellowship and camaraderie compensated for a truly memorable evening. The Dinner Dance for Mr. and Mrs. Oorloff turned out to be a great success and it enabled the OBU Australia Branch to find its feet and galvanised the group of proud, loyal Wesleyites living in Melbourne.

Those early days were interesting and very important. Meetings, which were restricted to members only were held at Keeley Park Scout Hall, Clayton where our plans for the future were discussed. These meetings were entertaining and educational as well. The cross-section of members from different eras recounted their experiences and explained the basis for the folklore that generations of Wesleyites had come to hear about. Every meeting concluded with a rousing version of the College song and War Cry.

In due course, after a couple of years the committee prepared a draft constitution to present to the Members with a view to future operations as the OBU was growing from strength. The Constitution was adopted at a specially convened meeting on 14 June 1981. The introduction of the Constitution and a formal Executive saw the demise of the informal and convivial gatherings of all Members. This transition was necessary due to the growing membership and clear indications that the fledging Association had taken wing and was in full flight and able to pursue with greater vigour those aims to which it was committed.

On 16 April 1993, the OBU became an Incorporated Association and changed its name to “Wesley College (Colombo) Old Boys’ Union Australia Branch Incorporated”. The word “Colombo” was inserted to distinguish it from Wesley College in Melbourne. Membership of the OBU Australia Branch is drawn from most Capital Cities in Australia. Melbourne has the largest proportion of members because this is where the organisation was formed and is based. The Sri Lankan Community in Sydney embraced the Past Pupils Association concept in the nineties and the Old Wesleyites there formed a chapter in 1995. Close ties were forged between both Associations and the highlight being the inter-State visits between the associations for a cricket match and a good social outing. Sadly these

visits have not happened in recent years. There are a number of Wesleyites who have, as yet, not enrolled as members of the OBU. It would be a fair estimate that there are more than 300 Old Wesleyites in Australia. Links with Old Wesleyites from inter-State continue with the Claessen brothers, the Bartholomeusz family, Warwick de Kretser all of Adelaide, Haig Claessen and Nigel Christoffelsz from Perth, Bill Deutrom and the Poulter brothers from Brisbane.

The Committee of Management over the years has worked tirelessly to organise social outings such as Club Nights and the “Double Blue” Ball. In the 1980’s we were the first Past Pupils Association to have a Club Nite or as we termed it a “Podi Natuma” for our members residing in the Northern suburbs of Melbourne. These were low budget dances but very effective in getting the support of Old Wesleyites across Melbourne. We were fortunate to have excellent caterers in attendance at all our functions. Old Boys Maurice Mortier and Duleep Boteju, Melbourne’s pioneering Hopper Man have supported and catered for many OBU functions. The “Double Blue Ball” has grown in stature and has featured the creative talents of numerous Old Wesleyites with Dallas Achilles, Willard Joseph, Linden Boustead and Beverley Nathanielsz and their respective bands and the creative décor of Rienzie Mahamooth. The 125th Jubilee Celebration Ball being the standout with the Principal at the time – Ben and Ira Fernando, Old Boy and former Principal – Louis and Lisbeth Adhihetty from Switzerland, Upali Samararatna from Sri Lanka and many Old Wesleyites from inter-State and Melbourne gracing the occasion.

The OBU led the way in the early 1990’s by arranging a Seniors Lunch which has brought together many of our retired Senior Members. Our Senior Members look forward to this occasion when they can catch up with old friends. The success of this event has seen a similar format being introduced in many other Past Pupil Associations. It is well supported by the Senior Members. Whilst on the subject of Senior Members, I believe Vernon Achilles (father of Dallas and Delmer) is possibly the oldest Wesleyite in Australia and the world at the wonderful age of ninety seven.

Cricket matches were organized against the Old Royalist, Old Thomians, Old Trinitians and Old Bens. Stars of bygone eras that were game to play displayed their skills. The likes of Norman de la Harpe, Glenn Reimers, Robin Reimers, Delmer Achilles, Errol Smith, Harold Juriansz, Hilary de Vos, Everard Schoorman, Frank Schoorman, Reza Sinnen, Mahendra Dissanayake, Sanjeeva Wijesinghe and Danesh Dissanyake brought back memories of

their heroics at Campbell Park. Apologies to any names I may have omitted. Sri Lanka’s admittance as a major cricket-playing nation gave the OBU the opportunity to host Sridharan “Jega” Jeganathan and Abu Fuard on many visits to Melbourne. We were indeed proud of their achievements.

Links with the College were forged and strengthened over the years. The proceeds of the Dinner Dance and other fund raising activities enabled the OBU Australia Branch to make regular financial donations to the College. To this day, the Committee has been guided by this principle, that funds will be sent to support projects or needs of the College.

The OBU Australia Branch continues to help the College with the quantum of the individual donations over the years increasing in proportion to our financial standing. Donations have been made for academic (four computers) and sporting needs (matting for wickets, cricket balls, rugby boots, a new scoreboard (still in operation today), blazer fabric), new capital works programmes, building and property refurbishment. A special project to refurbish Marshall Perera’s house in his village was another well-supported project which was completed with the help of the members. The OBU Australia Branch has also established two scholarships. The Australia Branch donated two hundred 125th Jubilee Ties and a Pulpit Bible for the Chapel to commemorate this significant milestone. Funds have also been sent to the Old Wesleyites Sports Club with some of their fund raising projects. The OBU Australia Branch has played a pivotal role in using the resources of its Members to assist needy Old Wesleyites both local and overseas, hosting and assisting students who have come to Australia. The OBU in recent years has consolidated its ties with the Methodist College Old Girls Association. Members like Lassath Algama, Bill Deutrom and Ronnie de Kretser have always provided significant support on many projects and have readily responded to Wesley’s call. All these donations have been supplemented by donations directly to the College by Members of the OBU Australia Branch.

The OBU was a founding member that helped set up the Combined Colleges of Sri Lanka Carol Service in 1998. This event is well patronized by the Sri Lankan community in Melbourne. It has been instrumental in raising \$14,000 for charity from the proceeds of the offertory.

The opportunity never slips by for Old Wesleyites to gather be it to host Wesleyites and former teachers from inter-State and overseas when they visit Melbourne. One such occasion stands out in my mind the dinner we held for Mr and Mrs Felix

Premawardhena. Though a shadow of his former self he still had an imposing presence with his handle bar moustache. It was a memorable dinner with many Burgher students he had taught in attendance. Memories of those Sinhala classes where the Burgher boys were put through the mill reciting Sinhala Kavi were soon forgotten as did those memories of him meting out punishment for our misdemeanours. Some who could still recall the Kavi they had learned at Wesley proudly recited them. He was quite surprised given that many boys had difficulty in learning Kavi at school. Mr Premawardhena was deeply touched with the overall mood of the evening, particularly to be feted by so many Burgher Old Boys that had endured his classes. Here was a man that we all feared as a teacher but no longer was seen in that light. Instead, he was another caring teacher that had influenced our lives during our time at Wesley. Such an occasion would not have been possible if there was no association. One of the major benefits of the O.B.U. has been the ability to network and be in touch with many Old Wesleyites.

Whilst reflecting on the past twentyfive years I have fond memories of those Old Wesleyites that are no longer with us. Their contribution and input has been valued over the years. They are sadly missed but not forgotten and may they find eternal rest.

The changing times in modern society have also seen an erosion of the traditional values in Sri Lanka. Hardly any of the present students represent generational links with Wesley. There is therefore no connection that will perpetuate the rich tradition that is ours. Changing priorities and modern lifestyles have not been conducive to nurturing these values and I do not believe that the newer generation of Old Wesleyites will appreciate the traditions that were such an intrinsic part of our makeup. The OBU Australia Branch has been many things to many people and sadly if the current trend continues I believe the Australia Branch will be lucky to survive and celebrate its fiftieth anniversary. It is not a phenomenon unique to Wesley but one that is being experienced by all the Past Pupil Associations of Sri Lanka in Melbourne. The OBU Australia Branch has given each of us an opportunity to make new friends, reminisce and share those precious moments of our youth as students at Wesley College. Therefore we must treasure what we have and enjoy every moment when we meet. Our sincere thanks to the many volunteers who have given of their time on the many Committees over the past twenty five years to make the O.B.U. what it is today.

It has been my privilege as a founding member to have spent over twenty years in the capacity of Secretary and President and to have been involved in

every aspect of the OBU Australia Branch. It never ceases to amaze me, this camaraderie that we share as Wesleyites regardless of age. Those schoolboy days made a lasting impression on each one of us and as the words of our revered College Song state we are "bound by one fraternal band the band of double blue.." We are proud to be Wesleyites – Wesley to the fore.

Your Committee 2004

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