



Old Boys' Association Newsletter

October 2017

THE PRESIDENT 2017—18

Martin Blake

Martin attended Belfast Royal Academy from 1960 to 1967. In his early years he found himself in a geography class taught by the Headmaster, J.W. Darbyshire, who took a dim view of his choice of map colours. Neither was aware that colour blindness rather than carelessness was the cause and so school reports provided painful reading.

Fate then played a hand because, as he was young, Martin was permitted to play a second season for the Medallion Shield team. The 1965 team, of which he was captain, became the first Academy team to win a rugby trophy outright. From that moment on, an indulgent light shone over Master Blake's head from the Head's office in the Crombie Building. In 1966 he was awarded the Cricket Bat and the prize for English literature. The following year he was appointed Head Boy and played rugby for Ulster Schools and cricket for Ulster and Irish Schools.

After reading law at The Queen's University, Martin was called to the Northern Ireland Bar and combined a thriving practice with rugby for the Academy Club and cricket for Woodvale. In 1977 he found romance on the Academy Club tour to Canada and within a few years departed for San Francisco. He became an attorney at law and began legal practice in San Francisco, specializing in civil trial work. He joined The Irish Forum, an American organization dedicated to the peaceful resolution of The Troubles and actively promoted debates among those with whose views he regularly disagreed. In 1983 was recognized for his efforts by being presented to H.M. The Queen in San Francisco.

From 1991-2006, Martin served an Adjunct Professor of Law teaching advanced trial advocacy at the University of California, Hastings. He published over 40 legal articles and edited a chapter in a national legal textbook in which, to his relief, no one found any errors. In 2001, he was elected President of the San Francisco Trial Lawyers' Association and was subsequently nominated three times as their trial lawyer of the year. He has, from 2006 to the present, been named in all editions of the national reference book, 'Best Lawyers in America' and is an elected member of the leading trial lawyer organizations in the United States. He now manages an international legal consulting practice that he founded in California and is also a director of Juris Resolutions, the first commercial provider of mediation and arbitration services in N. Ireland.

In 2008, Martin married Jane whom he had first met in 1972 at a dance at The Academy Club on Salisbury Avenue. They lived in Mill Valley, California, for several years before returning to Belfast. Martin has three children, Jessica (33) and Joel (29), who live in California and Rory (16), who is in the Sixth Form at the school.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

It is a privilege to take over the helm of the Old Boys' Association and I am grateful to the work and commitment of my immediate predecessor, Rob Fletcher, and to the distinguished Old Boys who have preceded him and contributed so much while in this position. During the year before I took office, I became aware of three areas where I thought the Association might benefit from a new focus. The first was in reaching out to a younger generation of former pupils in the business community.

The Breakfast Club

Michael McDowell had run a successful business breakfast in a prior year and it seemed to both of us that this event could be developed into a regular event. The secret of success would lie in developing a well-organized event formula that would be attractive to younger members including old girls. We located the breakfasts at a central city location, The Ten Square Hotel. We utilized eventbrite.com not only to attract the online community but also to assist in marketing through social media. Each event started at 7:45 a.m. with an orange juice reception followed at 8:00 a.m. by a hot buffet. At 8:20 a.m. we showcased two speakers, a male and female former pupil who had something interesting to say. We limited them to ten minutes each with five minutes for questions. The event was finished at 8:50 a.m. in time for work.

So far we have had three events at which attendance has increased significantly and the feedback has been very positive. This event will continue to grow and will be an important tool in strengthening the organization and its connections to the school, In 2018 we hope to hold an event with the school for the benefit of school leavers.

The Association Website

We have been fortunate to have had several volunteers who have managed the website that has served us well for many years. However, it is now showing its age through both its appearance and the fact that it offers limited interactivity. Thus, for example, there is no ability for former pupils to find one another or communicate via the website.

Furthermore, because there is so much news and information that can be included in a well run website, the burden of operating one is excessive for one or even two persons. It is obvious to me that to have current and meaningful website, a coordinated team is needed to run the operation.

At the time of writing, I am therefore recruiting a team of old boys to help run the website as one would run a newspaper. I am also working with various old boys to develop a new framework and appearance for the site. As with all projects that depend on volunteers, one has to be patient but the response has been positive and I am hoping to demonstrate meaningful progress by the end of the year.

The Annual Dinner

There has been an undercurrent of opinion that the dinner might be revitalised by moving to a new location. I therefore formed a sub-committee to review the options and following its recommendations, the committee voted to move the event to The Europa Hotel. The move required a new date and so the 2017 dinner will take place on Saturday, November 4. It will be an historic dinner as it will feature Mrs. Hilary Woods, the school's first woman Principal, as well as the former Chief Justice of Northern Ireland and Supreme Court Judge, Lord Kerr of Tonaghmore.

Looking Forward

I believe that we are on the way to seeing a stronger and revitalized Association and am excited about the prospects of working with a new school principal as well as committed group of younger members. Our aspirations would be possible without the steady hand of our Past Presidents, the institutional knowledge and contacts of "Doc. Malone" our irreplaceable secretary, Louis Campbell, and the support of my Senior Vice President, Robert McIlhagger, to whom I hope to leave a smoothly running organizational limousine and not a stationary wreck.

June 16, 2017: Special Cricket Celebrations

June 2017 marked the 50th anniversary of the 1967 1st XI cricket team, arguably one of the greatest teams ever to play for the school. Five of the team played for Irish Schools and three of the team (Graham Crothers, Ian Johnston and Christopher Harte) subsequently played for Ireland. The team famously bowled out Campbell College for 5 and the team captain, Ian Johnston, scored a record 152 in the schools' international v. Wales at Swansea.

The team and coaches held a celebration lunch in the school library on Friday, June 16, 2017, with 10 of the original squad of players along with former masters, Robin Reid, who coached the team, and Arthur Thompson. The Headmaster also attended and organized a school tour for the team.

Following lunch, the team attended the Old Boys' XI v The School match at The Castle Grounds where, as befitted the occasion, the sun appeared to warm memories. Team member and current President Martin Blake played and bowled a wide variety of deliveries, a few of which landed on the wicket. A number of distinguished Old Boys, including Sir Donald Murray, also attended the match to share their memories for a video history of Academy cricket. Graham Crothers interviewed those attending and it is hoped that the final video, to be produce by Roly Jamison, will be available shortly.

In the evening, a selection of cricketing alumni attended a dinner to celebrate the history of Academy cricket at The Royal Belfast Golf Club, Craigavad. The event attracted approximately 25 guests who careers spanned a period of almost 75 years at BRA. Former Headmaster William Sillery, a canny off spin bowler in his day, spoke amusingly to the guests who enjoyed an evening of anecdotes and memories.



Front row, from left to right: Graham Crothers (1967), Sir Donald Murray (1945), Martin Blake (1967)
Back row: Roy Robinson (1968), Derek Reade (1961), Alan McCully (1969), Dennis O'Hara (1968)



From left to right: Roy Robinson (1968), Billy Tennant (1955), Robbie Harrison (1955), Tony Cole (1961)

The Old Boys' Association organised a Networking Breakfast, in conjunction with the Old Girls' Association, at the Ten Square Hotel on Thursday 9th February 2017. Jacqui Berkeley, BBC producer of The Nolan Show and the series 'Wanted Down Under', and Marty Neil, music journalist, founder and CEO of AirPOS Ltd, a successful international technology start-up, were the guest speakers for this event. Twenty-nine former pupils attended. Matthew Corkey introduced the speakers.

A second Networking Breakfast was held at Ten Square on Thursday 11th May 2011. The speakers at this event were Kevin McNamee, Finance Director of the Denroy Group and Angela Magowan, Director of the Confederation of British Industry Northern Ireland. Thirty-five people attended. The President, Michael McDowell and an Old Girl, Laura Jackson were responsible for the organisation of this event. Mark Regan has agreed to join the organising Sub-Committee.



BRA Business Breakfast - 10 Square Hotel - 11-May-2017
 Martin Blake Angela McGowan Kevin McNamee Michael McDowell
 President BRA OB Director of Conf British Indust. Fin'l Director - The Denroy Grp Breakfast MC

Golf News

Picken Cup at Malone G.C. Thursday 22nd June 2017 – Winner: Chris Magee
 Tim Weir's Captain's Day at Royal Belfast G.C. Friday 8th September 2017 – Winner: James Beattie
 Ferguson Cup for best aggregate score over two outings – Winner: Robbie Horton
 To book your place for the 2018 matches, please contact Ken Knox: e-mail ken@cd-group.com or Iain Knox iainknox@cd-group.com

Dates for your diary

Annual Dinner: Europa Hotel, Saturday 4th November 2017
 Networking Breakfast: Ten Square Hotel, 19th January 2018 (provisional)
 London Dinner: RAF Club, Friday 9th March 2018
 Networking Breakfast: School, 23rd March 2018 (provisional)
 Edinburgh Dinner: Friday 27th April 2018
 Networking Breakfast: Ten Square Hotel, 15th June 2018 (provisional)
 Golf - Picken Cup: Malone GC 14th June 2018
 Jeremy Weir's Captain's Day: Royal Belfast GC, Friday 14th September 2018