

Briars Annual Dinners

Members, family and guests of Briars enjoyed these annual 'black Tie' affairs, which were held in July or August each year. Timed to accommodate Briars sporting draws and international rugby fixtures, these large occasions were held away from the Club premises. A few were held at Hotels, most at Concord Golf Club, Concord Function Centre or a racecourse function area, such as Rosehill or Canterbury Race Course. The guest speakers always provided the highlight of the evening's proceedings. Invariably, a well-respected club member responded with a thank you to the speaker. For many years Chris Mitchell fulfilled this role. His replies were always entertaining and humorous. Some would argue he was often better than the speaker. In latter years, this job fell to others who were just as entertaining. We can recall the wit of John Jessup. These formal events were well attended and mostly paid for themselves. However, at times the number of attendees fell, placing stress on the social chairman and the club's budget. We all have memories of our favourite speaker, and invariably the atmosphere of the evening was bright, the camaraderie jovial if not somewhat boisterous. Older members often lamented on the behaviour of the younger members. All occasions ended back at the club at George St for the final 'roader or three' and that dangerous game of "club rugby".

Below is the appraisal by Stan McGregor, of the Annual Dinner celebrating Briars 50th Anniversary.

50th Anniversary Dinner 6 July 1968

Our deepest sympathy goes out to all Briars, past, and present, who were absent ~0DI the fabulous 50th Anniversary Dinner. It was a fitting climax to a year of well organised functions, which were held at intervals during the past twelve months, commencing with the Inaugural Dinner in August 1967, and including among the highlights the Church Service at St. Ann's Strathfield, and the Anniversary Ball at Menzies Hotel.

The success of all these functions were due to the tremendous amount of work put in by the Anniversary Committee, headed initially by Aud Land and later by Bill Elder, which included representatives of every age group in the Club.

In organising the final dinner, experts in their field (liquid consumption) such as Andy Clifford and John Wearne, were able, by the use of computers, to estimate to the last fluid ounce the liquid refreshments required by the largest gathering of Briars ever to assemble under the one roof. These experts, with typical generosity, did not forget the soft drink addicts like Lemonade Land, Passiona Prowse and Ginger Ale Geoffrey, and suitable provision was made to keep them happy. When the guest speaker, Chief Justice, Sir Leslie Herron rose to propose the toast of "The Briars Sporting Club" he stated that he looked out upon as fine a cross-section of the citizens of this State as it had ever been his pleasure to address. With typical Briars modesty, this remark was greeted with a storm of applause.

At least ninety-five percent of the gathering were past or present members and included men who have made their mark in the business, legal and medical worlds. Among those present was a Judge of the Supreme Court, and Chairman of the N.S.W. Public Service Board, modestly accepting congratulations on his recently acquired knighthood.

The choice of Sir Leslie as guest speaker was an inspirational. In his younger days, a rower and first grade Rugby footballer, and later on a fine administrator in such varied fields of sport as Swimming, Football and Golf, his interest in the Club stemming from the time his younger brother, Alan, was a member. He is a typical example of the interest most leading men of this state take in sport generally. As an after-dinner speaker, just let it be said that he is of the Menzies tradition. President Geoff Whiddon responded and welcomed the official guests, from the N.S. W., Sydney and Sub-District Rugby unions, the State Cricket and Hockey Associations, the Mayors of Burwood and Concord - Alderman Les Davis, the Mayor of Concord, being present in a dual; capacity, his official one and as a member of the Club - and last, but not least, the Presidents of the Western Suburbs Rugby and Cricket Clubs. The highlight of the President's remarks came when he mentioned the debt owed to the Club over the past fifty years to one, Bob Clark. The gathering rose as one man and paid spontaneous tribute to our Elder Statesman. A similar burst of applause later greeted the name of to-day's Secretary, Ted Stockdale.

The gathering was so large, somewhere about 870, and there was so much movement, that the writer found it difficult to speak to even a few old friends, but for the statistically minded, here are a few figures of interest. Give or take a man or two, there were present at least nine members of the 1923 first competition football team, seven members of the 1922/1923 First competition Cricket team, seven members of the first football premiership side (Burke Cup,1925) and a similar number of the first Cricket premiership team (C Grade Junior, 1924/25). The Burke Cup 1934 Premiers topped the list with eleven present. Hockey's Minor "A" Grade Premiers of 1950 were represented by nine members. Every premiership side since, be it Cricket, Football or Hockey, had it a representation at the gathering. In short, gentlemen, it was a night to remember.

Briars Annual Dinners Guest Speaker List:

1965	Peter Crittle
1966	Peter Philpott
1967	Sir Charles Moses CBE
1968 (50 th Anniversary)	Sir Leslie Herron CBE
1969	Alan McGilvray
1970	John Thornett
1971	Alan Davidson
1972	Gordon Samuels QC
1973	REM Bill McLaughlin
1974	Norman May
1975	Peter Johnson
1976	Tim Caldwell

1977	Dicks Marks
1978 (60 th Anniversary)	John Lambie, Bob Simpson
1979	Rod Phelps
1980	John O'Shea
1981	Gordon Bray
1982	Tony Greig
1983	Doug Walters
1984	Campbell McComas, (posing as Guinness Book of Records Authority Bert Nettleton)
1985	Alan Jones
1986	Mark Ella
1987	Max Walker
1988	Andrew Slack
1989	John Coates
1990	Michael Cleary
1991	Geoff Lawson
1992	Peter Fitzsimons
1993 (75 th Anniversary)	Roger Vanderfield; Chris Walker; John Jessup
1994	Michael Whitney
1995	Ray Hadley
1996	Gordon Samuels AO
1997	Murray Hartin
1998	Len Pasoe
1999	Jim Maxwell
2000	Mick Ellem; Stephen James
2001	Bob Dwyer; Gavin Robertson; Calvin Degrey
2002	John Coates AO; Louise Savage OAM
2003	Nick Farr-Jones AM
2004	Kerry O'Keefe
2005	Dawn Frazer AO MBE
2018 (100th anniversary)	Robert de Castella AO MBE

Some Photos from the 75th Anniversary Dinner 1993





