

Watsonian Open Meeting Report 2016

I had thought after 42 years at GWC I should have been given an honourable discharge and head off into the sunset. The persuasive powers of the then new Principal Melvyn and Lesley McKean meant that there was to be a delay in the plans. I do have to say I am delighted that I agreed firstly in that it is an interesting, challenging but enjoyable job and secondly it does allow me to wean myself away from what has been my workplace for many years.

Henry Peel Ritchie

My first official duty was in fact deputising for the President Marion Davison. Edinburgh City Council decided to recognise all City recipients of the Victoria Cross won during the First World War. Due to extreme bravery Henry , a young Naval officer was awarded the VC on 10 April 1915. Outside his birth place in Melville Street a flagstone was placed celebrating this achievement. Along with the Royal Navy , The Secretary of State, Principal, Head Boy , Head Girl and myself representing the Club, a wonderful ceremony was enjoyed.

Dinners

Dinners have always been important to the Club. I have enjoyed Watsonian company in Inverness Aberdeen, Yorkshire, South West in Bath, London, and of course our own dinner here in Edinburgh. The attraction of dinners has changed, there are so many functions around now it can be hard to choose just what to support. Some of our branches now have a lunch reflecting perhaps the age of the participants but nothing wrong with that. Social media has also played a big part in formal dinners. In the past the dinner was an opportunity to catch up with old friends , make new ones and generally catch up on all the gossip. Now by simply turning on the phone you know has married who, what family they have , what they had for breakfast ,totally different to the past. What has heartened me on my dinner travels is that in most areas we are strong. I know from speaking to kindred Clubs numbers are falling, yet in London there was a sell out dinner with probably over a third being in their twenties or early thirties, Hong Kong has over 60 attending and indeed need to move venue to cope. Interestingly they have moved to the Lockhart Suite of the Hong Kong Football Club. Stewart Lockhart being the first Governor of Hong Kong and a Watsonian. As an aside The Principal has been on his travels and met Watsonians at dinners in Toronto, Vancouver and Washington. He was greeted with typical Watsonian hospitality and interest.

Sections

Just as the Branches are important to the Club so our Sections allow the opportunity to enjoy sport after School life. The years have witnessed many changes to our Sections not least allowing non Watsonians the opportunity to enjoy playing under the Watsonian banner. My personal opinion is that without the industry and commitment of those people few of our Sections would have survived. Thankfully we have extremely successful Sections running at the moment. I have shot, watched Curling, shouted at Rugby, chatted at Cricket I have still to visit Hockey and watch Charlie Hill play Squash! I just felt it right to show face and interest in the Sections with a visit and I have really enjoyed seeing just how each function and perform. It is worth remembering that all Sections run under the banner of the Watsonian Council and on occasions Council has stepped in to ensure that the name Watsonian is not compromised.

Council

We have been really lucky over the years with our Council members, we appreciate they give up time to help stabilise the Watsonian Club and we are grateful for that. Over the years I have been involved however I had the feeling that it was becoming a reporting vehicle rather than a proactive meeting. Partly of course this has been due to the establishment of the Development Office who have responsibility for

the School former pupils, and we do appreciate all that is done in this regard. For a Club to progress however I feel that an active Council has to be a benefit. In this regard therefore Council has introduced some new members. David Mieras continues to impart his wisdom as does Martin Macari. Martin is not at all well at the moment and we all wish him well at this difficult time. The Principal and Lesley McKean are there by dint of job. Bruce McPherson returned into the area from working in London and joined Council last year. However work demands make attending Council difficult but he is a valuable asset. New onto Council is Kathleen Morris. Kathleen worked for Sky as a presenter followed by time with breakfast TV and presenting a Rugby programme for STV. Along with her husband they formed the Kukri sports company, which became a top brand chosen by the GB team in the last Olympics. Fiona Hourston is a former pupil and former member of Staff and Douglas McCallum from the music department is a former pupil and current member of staff. We have been rather skewed towards sports on Council and hopefully this redresses the balance. Finally in an effort to enlighten S6 we have asked two members of the year to serve on Council and very successful it has been.

To all Council members I give my thanks.

Club Finance

A summary of accounts was presented.

360

As you probably know the Principal in an effort to assess the standing of GWC in both the family and local community commissioned a 360 degree study of the School. This in depth process enabled those charged with running Watson's to reassess many of the systems involved in running a large School in these modern times. In short the School is in good heart. Parallel to this study it was decided to use the same company to assess the wider Watsonian community. As a Borderer I know more than most the situation of 'it's aye been'. In many ways I understand it and certainly if it ain't broke why change it? We are however more progressive than that. Our members deserve better. In reality however we had no idea just what the masses thought about the Club, its communication, events and the many other areas it covers.

Well, I am delighted to tell you that it was really positive. I could spend the rest of the night reporting to you in depth but let me just give you some highlights

4447 Former pupils and former staff emailed 3001 opened 67% very high rate. 1411 responded again high infact 32% took part.

51% satisfied with the Club 49 % had no opinion

The top three words that described the Watsonian Club were Friendly, Rugby, Myreside.

Best thing about being a Watsonian; Great start in life, Lifelong Friendships, Global network. Sense of belonging.

What is of interest; Caritas magazine 70%, Reunions 60%, Watsonian magazine 45% Network 44% suggested an online Watsonian magazine

55% thought the Benevolent Fund was extremely important or important.

Name of the Club; 51% The Watsonian Club, No opinion 25% Watsonians 17%

To improve, clarify purpose, raise awareness, appraise what would attract members to attend branches.

Feeling connected, 59 % feel connected, 35% find it easy to be in touch

Highest attendance was at Reunions followed by Sports events and then School events. 5% had attended the Watsonian Dinner.

Social networking showed that by far Facebook was the most popular with over 60% using that network.

97% supported the ethos of the George Watson's Family Foundation.

Suggested Capital projects were Myreside, Sports facilities, Drama and Theatre facilities.

What image represents the School - badge, building, Galleon, flaming heart.

61 % went to University, 16% started with an employer, 12% to college, in terms of employment, highest was 13% Education. The next top occupations were healthcare, legal profession, banking and finance and property.

As I have said a great deal of useful information and just as importantly a lot of support for what is happening.

School.

The Presidency allows one to visit the School on many occasions and Florence and I have taken advantage of that. We have witnessed musical performances of the highest standard, St Giles at Xmas is unforgettable. Art of a quality that shames my total lack of skill, sport excelling in both numbers of participants and level of performance, Witnessing the 1st XV lifting the Brewin Dolphin cup for the fourth year in succession was memorable. But it is the informal occasions that I enjoy most. The school produces confident young people, happy to get involved, happy to help and all done without arrogance, they are wonderful ambassadors for Watson's and all involved in their education and progress should be rightly proud.

The way ahead

As members of our Professional association Lesley and I met with most Independent Schools in the Country. All agree that former pupils are vital to the School and its future. How they deal with their former pupils differs greatly. There are some not too far away from here that run totally independently with records held in a shoe box! I have to report that the relationship between Watson's and its former pupils is excellent, never perfect to all but certainly willing to help in many areas.

From the 360 degree survey suggestions were made as to ways volunteers may get involved. The first idea is just in the process of starting up. A small group of volunteers are running an audio archive. Talking to Watsonians young and old remembering times gone by, interesting journeys, occupations, memories all either taped on audio or filmed and then available on line. An interesting project and I look forward to its first results. In the pipeline could be something along the lines of a choir. It is important not to take on the world and produce nothing therefore it is slowly developing.

Benevolent Fund

Such an important part of the Club and I would urge you all to keep this fund in your mind and if ever a Watsonian needs the type of support the Club offers do get in touch. Contact details are available in the Caritas magazine.

Doing a second year

As you will appreciate there is a lot happening, a lot to be involved in and much to do. I have really enjoyed my involvement. Listening to recent Presidents they were disappointed when the year passed as most felt they were just getting into the swing of things when their time was up. Of course at that point the job is done and involvement ceases. Our Constitution allows a President to serve up to two years in

office and for the reasons I have given in terms of progressing some of the new initiatives mentioned in my report I would like to serve that extra year. I would remind the meeting that it is not mandatory however and encourage any member willing to serve to let the Office know.

I would like to record my thanks to my Vice President Robert Heatly, always interested and willing to get involved and I appreciate his support.

Finally, and thank you for your patience, can I thank the team at the School for making the post of President so enjoyable. We have a Principal that totally understands the importance of Former Pupils to the School and actively encourages innovation and contact to cement this special bond.

The Development Office works tirelessly in support of Watsonians worldwide and we all owe them a great thank you for this. The Office is going through change, Lesley will have a strategic role as Development Director and Morven Skirving will be the first point of contact for Watsonians as well as organising events and functions/

Thank you all for coming along tonight please stay on and have time to mix and chat back in the bar.

Notes/Questions from the night

Robin Morris noted that 2 of the Victoria Cross recipients still need to be presented. Lesley noted that these are awarded on the anniversary of the award. The government has donated flagstones for all recipients. Currently Commander Ritchie, 1st Naval Commander of WW1 has a stone at Melville Street.

Martha Dickson noted that she liked the School's Recorder magazine and would have liked it to go to other former pupils. Lesley noted the birthday card protocol whereby those 80, 90, 100 and 100+ receive a birthday card and Recorder from the School. Recorder is also sent out in e-newsletters.