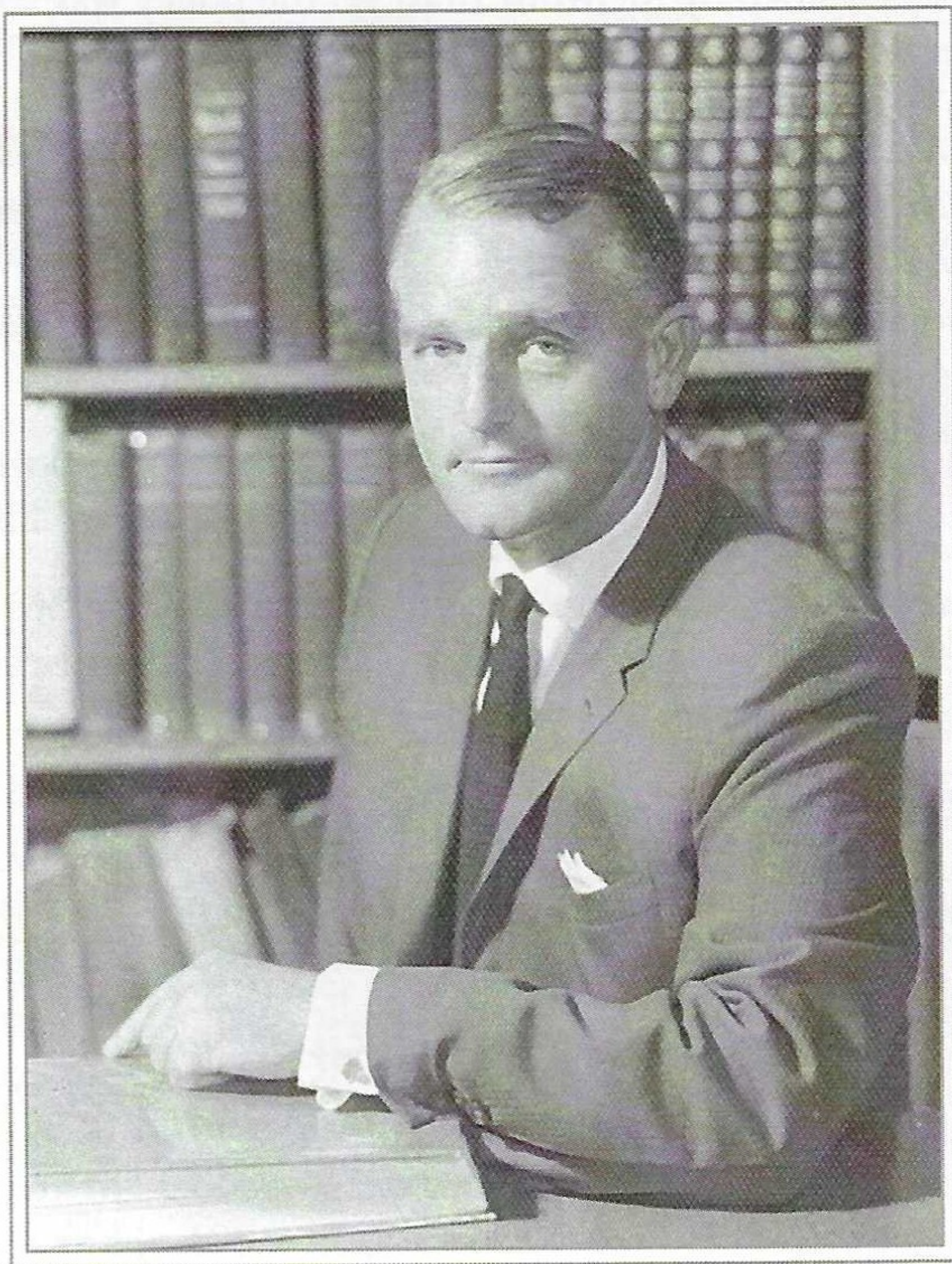


A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY

In the beginning...

It is hard to imagine what it was like in the beginning for Robb College. Imagine the first Master of Robb, Ben Meredith, sitting down and writing a set of rules about how students should behave at dinner. It must have been incredibly exciting for Robb's first students, Fellows, Tutors and staff. They were establishing a great institution. Did they know that, did they have any thoughts of being pioneers? It must have been both exciting times and frustrating times



Ben Meredith, First Master of Robb College

There were problems. A report dated 10th March 1960 with the initials BCJM on it, describes how the hot water reticulation system "would not be completed from Wright College from the Wright College dining, to provide radiation and hot water to Robb College, for months to come". The document describes a dispute between the works' foremen, Mr. Herbert, Mr. Daniel, the Mechanical Engineer and Hocking, the heating contractor. Ben wrestled with the problem of when he would be able to move some of his students from Robb Town Houses to his first Robb building. This also reminds me of the importance good heating for the operation of the new College Block and the comfort of its inhabitants. In my first week at UNE in 1970, I was allocated a room in the Hill Blocks, which was then part of Robb College. The water in the pipes froze, I believe it was minus seven degrees and this was only February. The heating probably was completed on time but it must have been a stressful period for Ben and others who were establishing Robb.

Many of the first Robb people like Ben Meredith, the first College Club President, Laurie Piper and the first married tutor Don Bewley were deeply involved in establishing

processes and procedures which provided the foundation for the great College that we know today. Every one of the thousands that have lived worked and played sport for Robb – students, staff, senior common room members, foundation members, friends of Robb and guests of Robb – have contributed towards the Robb that we know today. Many regard Robb as the flagship of the UNE residential system. As a recent new Fellow said "It is a no-contest, I would not join any other College, Robb has a combination of historic formality – the train of Fellows, with gowns and colours, flowing into a Formal dinner with all students standing – melded with the ambience of a large group of friends living and studying together"

After searching through the various places that Robb College stores its records I came across a neat file encased in a soft heavy paper foolscap file. As I had very little in the way of Robb records I was not expecting much. I looked through the files and to my amazement the story of how Robb started and developed through its first four years unfolded. The file contained original and copies of letters, memos, student lists, examination results, rules, regulations and procedures initiated by the Robb College Office by Ben Meredith and others. It also contained originals and copies of letters from various officers of UNE and the Council. Leafing through the documents I started to have a glimpse of the first few years of Robb College. Using this information, University handbooks and some memories of former Robb students I decided to put pen to paper.

The idea for the University's college system started in the early 50s and became a serious endeavour in the latter part of the decade. The first women's college was Mary White established in 1958. The college's residents used the Booloomimbah dining hall, Mary White's dining hall and kitchen facilities were still in the planning stages. The first men's college, Wright, was established in 1958, this college's dining hall was opened in 1961. Duval college was established in 1959 as the second women's college. The second men's college, Robb, commenced operations in 1960. The core members of Robb's first Senior Common room consisted of the Master, the Vice-master, Mr Albert Bussell, Professor B.L.D Coghlan and Professor J.M. Somerville. Albert went on to be appointed the first Master at Earle Page College but he stayed on as a Fellow of Robb for a long time.

The first building at Robb, South Court, was commenced late in 1959 and Ben Meredith was appointed as the College's first Master. A Robb college advisory committee was set up by the UNE Council to oversee the operation of the College. The advisory committee included the higher officers of the university, the Chancellor P.A. Wright, the Vice-Chancellor R.B. Madgwick and the Registrar Mr T.C. Lamble. These names should be familiar to many UNE students. Incidentally, Robb College was named after the 1958 UNE registrar W.M Robb.

Initially Robb had no building of its own and all students were housed in a series of town houses with names such as Beta, Kendall, St Cuthberts, Coolrie, Comeytrowe, Lawson, Beta and Esrom. Some of the original town houses still exist. Students from Robb also lived in Alluna on campus which later was known as the 'Hill Blocks'. The Hill Blocks were situated in the campus rather than the lower college area as we know it now. My experience with the Hill Blocks

gave me the suggestion that this was really a sub-college of Robb. We ate breakfast at Mary White, dinner at Robb and had 'head', that in the memories of some of the Robb students of the later 60s ran the Hill Blocks. Yes it was part of Robb but I.G. Grenfell was officially the 'Senior Resident Fellow of the Hill Annex' (UNE Handbook 1970).

The first Robb SCR was developed in the first few months of 1960 and it consisted of the following people:

Mr	MEREDITH	B	CJ	Master
Mr	BUSSELL	A	CJ	Vice-Master
Professor	COGLAN	B	LD	Hon Fellow
Professor	SOMERVILLE	J	M	Fellow
Dr	CAMPBELL	K		Fellow
Dr	HORADAM	A	F	Fellow
Dr	HARRINGTON	H	J	Fellow
Mr	BEWLEY	D	R	Res Fellow married
Mr	DAWSON	T	J	tutor
Mr	FINDLAY	A	W	tutor
Mr	GOLLEDGE	R	G	tutor
Mr	MANSER	W		tutor
Mr	PARER	J	T	tutor
Mr	ROBERTSON	A	G	Res fellow single

It is here that we notice a difference between Fellows and Tutors that does not exist today. Tutors were not Fellows of Robb College, Resident Fellows had obtained their degrees and had already developed a 'standing' in the academic world or in the higher administration of the university system. The official position of tutors in the College was clarified in a document dated 9/3/10 (B.C.J Meredith) "In 1960 the Resident tutors will be Associate members of the Senior Common Room". The following excerpt from a document from March 1960 highlights the standing of Fellows in the operation of Robb College.

The Master, under the University Council and any governing body that might be appointed, is responsible, with the aid of the Fellows, for the running of the College and its future development.

The first Robb building, South Court was completed in about April 1960 and it housed 80 students, college lists indicate that another 135 Robb students lived in the town houses. Each of the Robb town houses had a tutor and or a resident fellow as well as resident fellows in Robb proper.

Meals for Robb were either in the Bevery or Wright College. It seems that the Bevery was used for formal events and the Wright Dining hall for other meals.

- 1. The main body of the College will take their places by the tables and remain Standing.*
- 2. Senior members will enter and all members will enter and all members of the*
- 3. College will sit when the presiding member of high table sits.*
- 4. At the conclusion all members will stand and the presiding member will say Grace. There will be no smoking before Grace.*

(BM 14/3/60)

The Robb traditional Grace was also devised:

For membership of this College and University, for the opportunity of learning and of fellowship let us be grateful.

The procedures for visitors to Robb were strict:

Members may entertain women visitors at the following times:

Afternoons – 2.00pm to 5.00pm

Evenings – 7.30pm to 12 midnight, Tuesday, Friday and

Saturday. – 7.30pm to 10 pm on other evenings.

Can one imagine Ben Meredith, the Vice-Master and the Fellows sitting down in a meeting and developing these procedures?

Another memo states the policy controlling visitors. The memo is headed by the word 'draft' so the policy was still in its development stage but it was applied.

Such visiting may only take place in common rooms. No visitors (of either sex) will be allowed in residences after midnight.

Just a week later it was decided that women visitors could be entertained in the rooms of members of the College on Saturday and Sunday afternoons from 2pm to 5pm.

The College Club, the original name for the Junior Common room, was established in March 1960 by Ben Meredith. "All members of the College other than Fellows and Resident Tutors will belong to the College Club".

"The Interim Committee will comprise of a President who will be elected by the members entitled to vote for the Committee and a Committee of eight. The Committee will comprise of four members who will be due to go into the College building proper when it is completed and four members from either Alluna or the town houses." (B. Meredith 5.3.1960)

Later in March the first Interim Committee of the College Club was established:

<i>President:</i>	<i>Mr Graham Gibson</i>
<i>Vice-President:</i>	<i>Mr Laurie Piper</i>
<i>Secretary:</i>	<i>Mr David Heath</i>
<i>Treasurer</i>	<i>Mr Robert Boesen</i>

One of the first powers given to the College Club Committee was as follows:

Power has been delegated to the College Club Committee to levy a penalty of Half a crown on members who fail to appear at formal dinner correctly Dressed, or are guilty of unreasonable behavior on any occasion in the Dining Room. (23/3/1960 B. Meredith)

In a circular dated 29 March 1960 signed by Meredith it is stated that a College Library was being established and that "Mr Geoffrey Forster of Abington is paying for a portrait of the late W.M. Robb" and following "The University has now commissioned the well-known artist, Mr Joshua Smith, to carry out the portrait."

By the end of April 1960 Robb's first College Club

Committee was established based on the original Interim Committee

FIRST COLLEGE CLUB COMMITTEE (1960)

President	Laurie	Piper	R.Sc.111
Vice-President	Graham	Gibson	Dip.Ed
Secretary	David	Heath	R.Sc.111
Treasurer	Bob	Boesen	Dip.Ed
Committee	Alan	Twomey	R.Sc.111
	Lachlan	Marsh	Sc 1V
	Barry N	Roberts	Arts 111
Librarian	Greg	Williams	Sc 1V
Assistant Librarian	David	Ellyard	Sc 11
Social & Activities officer	Bernie	Bindon	R.Sc. 111
	Bob	Loch	Sc. 111
Dining Hall	Geoffrey (Jeff)	Patterson	R.Sc.11

Reference: Memo from D.Heath Secretary circa April 1960

The College Club became an integral part of various committees that were planning and developing the college. In the Robb College Building Report – 1960 Mr. Piper made the following comments:-

- (a) Shower nozzles are too low.
- (b) Rain tends to come through the study windows.
- (c) The doors on either side of the main foyer are not entirely satisfactory.

We should also notice that the various offices or jobs of the College Committee are fairly similar to those allocated in future years. In the following year the jobs of 'Telephone Officer and 'Music Officer' are allocated (Druitt, JCR Data Base 2010). There have been changes over the decades. In 1969 the College Club became 'the Junior Common Room and in 1986 the positions of 'Cultural Officer' and 'Traditions Officer' were allocated. In the information and rules given to all College members dated 9/3/60 Meredith states that "There is one telephone for use by junior members of the college. The College Club will arrange a roster of freshmen (sic) to do "telephone" duty at night". The position of telephone officer appears in the 1961 College Club list and I surmise that a Telephone Officer was appointed by the original College Club Committee at a later date in 1960. R.F Thornton, known as Tim, a recent respondent – and provider of information – was the first recorded Telephone Officer in 1961. Tim will tell us a little about the Robb College he remembers later in this story.

In a memo from Ben Meredith dated 26/4/60 Ben states "I am now as confident as one can safely be that we will be able to occupy the first block of the College from the beginning of next term". Further on in the document Meredith describes how College Building committee had been established and all Robb members were invited to make suggestions concerning changes to the next block of College. "... Provided that they are signed by the author and couched in temperate language".

From the beginning Robb was to be involved in the Academic life of the University

Many documents report that the ties between the UNE

teaching departments and Robb were strong. Each student had an academic tutor and a 'moral tutor'. This was for all Robb students in whatever building they resided. Below is a sample of a teaching department of UNE reporting to Robb the results of an examination.

The college was now starting to operate properly. In the UNE of the 60s there was a close relationship between the teaching departments (schools) of the University and the colleges. Professor Somerville sent the College a list of Term 1 Examination results. Here is a sample of these results for Applied Mathematics 1

	Mechanics	Vectors
BARTRIM, I.S.	C	A
BLACKERT, Beth	D	B
BLACKLOW, R.D.	C	B
BLANCH, A.D.	B	B
CANE, Joycelyn	A	A
COYNE, T.N.R.	A	B

A= Pass with Merit B= Good pass
 C= Bare Pass D= Just under pass standard
 E= Unsatisfactory
 (No 1 1960)

In a long 'Note for the College Advisory Committee on Future Building' B.C.J.M. Was hoping that a START ON A 2ND RESIDENTIAL BLOCK FOR Robb could be commenced very soon.

As the Committee is aware I have already written to the Vice-Chancellor requesting that approval be sought to anticipate the availability of finance in order that a start may be made on the next residential block of the College and that work may start no later than 1ST July, 1960.



Photo courtesy of John Judson – Robb residents 1960-1963

College would be housed in the College buildings. He further writes that he is anticipating the end of the "Town House system provided further College building proceeds in succeeding years." The same document sets a clear path for the completion of Robb and discusses the Master's house and Dining Hall Block.

Meredith was hoping that the new building would be completed before the start of the 1961 academic year and he was anticipating that most of the members of the

At the commencement of the new 1961 academic year Robb had 215 members made up of 83 in the only College building, 41 in Alluna and 91 in the five townhouses: Beta, Comeytroe, Coolrie, Kendall and Lawson (Robb College Report No.1-1961 BCJ Meredith).

In a letter dated 12/4/61 written by D.Dexter, Secretary of the Australian Universities Commission to R.B Madgwick it is stated that the building of the second residential block will commence soon. In a memo from Dexter two days later the building of the third residential block (West Court) and the Dining Hall block are approved. It is interesting that in the various documents there is 'talk' of various recreational facilities being included in the new buildings for Robb. These include a squash court for the Dining Hall Block, a recreational room or small gymnasium area for the third residential block – with the possibility that a boxing ring could be erected and the provision of a table tennis area.

In 1961 Robb continued to share the Bevery with Wright College for formal meals. A new dining hall was being built for Wright and the Master was hopeful of being able to move all meals from the Bevery to Wright College (B.C.M Meredith – Report to the University Council-1961-No1). In November 1961 the second residential block was still under construction and would be known as "North Court", the third residential block will be known as 'West Court' and the Dining Hall Block will be known as "East Court" or the "Hall" (15/11/61 B.C.J.M). There were also problems about sharing the new Wright Dining hall with Robb College.

On 23/11/61, K.R.Long, the Acting Registrar of UNE wrote to the Government Architect "I am instructed to write requesting that you seek prices from Moniers and R. & B. for the construction of units 3 and 4 of Robb College". This probably refers to West Court and the Hall. The letter further adds that it was not expected that these buildings be completed prior to the 1963 academic year.

On the 6th of June 1962 there is an interesting letter from H.J. (Larry) Harrington, a Fellow of Robb who provides a record of opinion of the sub-committee of Fellows "that you need to consider the selection of tableware and crockery for the College Dining Hall. There were a lot of notes on "Silver Plate v Stainless Steel". North Court was completed for the start of the 1963 academic Year. That the tables and chairs in the Robb dining hall were especially constructed for Robb is a part of the Robb story.

In 'Notes for meeting of the College Advisory Committee – 29th May 1963 there are a few insights into the building program for the College. Professor Somerville writes "It is essential that the whole College dines together, even if only once or twice a week. Architects state 300 could dine in the Robb Dining Hall, but I have some doubts about this". . Somerville makes the suggestion that an additional floor be built on West Court which would put College numbers up to 260. These numbers would be the Robb people actually housed in the Robb College buildings. West Court was then being planned as a two story building.

A document, undated, discusses the possibility of arranging theatrical productions in the yet to be completed dining hall and the development of the Robb Art Collection. These two aspects of Robb's history stand out like beacons, Robb has had a wonderful movement to mount productions and decorate the walls with significant works of Art. The second head of Robb, Mick Sinclair-Wilson involved himself in the Robb 'theatre movement' in the 70s with Jim Irvine the college head of the 80s continuing Robb's theatre tradition. One has to just walk around Robb to understand the importance of Art to Robb. This tradition was cemented with the First Robb Art Exhibition which was held in the mid-eighties with the 'Art Shows' continuing to the present day.

Robb has an incredible sporting tradition with males dominating the makeup of the University teams of the 60s and this great sporting tradition continued with females after their inclusion in Robb. The recent reunion of the 1960 UNE Rugby Union team was notable for the large number of Robb students in the team. Geoff Judson was one of them.



Photo courtesy of Geoffrey Judson, the first Robb College team that won a Premiership in the early 60s

Here the documents end but the story of the early years continues with the thoughts of two Robb students of the early 60s. Their words help to fill in some of the gaps in the document records and add a personal touch to the early story about Robb.

Mr Don Bewley

The first married tutor in Robb was Mr. Don Bewley. Unfortunately Mr. Bewley passed away in June this year. I was privileged to talk to Don by telephone in January and we exchanged a number of emails. Don was an Emeritus Professor at Massey University in New Zealand. He told me that he was unwell but that he had hopes of coming to Armidale for the reunion. Don was appointed to Robb College in March 1960 and left in April 1963.

He had what can be described as a brilliant academic career and he told me "a very satisfying life".

I sent Don a number of questions by email and we talked about them on the phone. Here are some of the questions asked and his answers.

What was the early Robb policy for fellow or tutors? What were the qualifications (criteria) needed to become a fellow of Robb college?

Fellows were tenured members of the UNE academic

staff; tutors tended to be graduate students with a measure of seniority but not tenure. I don't know what criteria were used but guess it was ad hoc for each appointment, choosing the candidate with the most appropriate CV; I believe my credentials to be the first Resident Fellow were simply more than those of the other candidates: I had been a student in residence for almost three years at Oxford and later for a graduate year at a residential college at an Italian university; I had been an academic in residence for two and a half years at a residential teachers college (for Malaysians) in Liverpool, UK; earlier I'd been a soldier for two and a half years, the last year and a half as a sergeant instructor in the occupation army in Germany.

Did the college and UNE have joint responsibility for student academic progression?

UNE and its faculties made the decisions about student progress; the colleges had a mentoring and counseling role but had no subject teaching role nor had any say in how students were assessed or graded.

Give a quick description of some of the SCR fellows that you knew in the early 60s.

I'll do this afterwards from your lists. With most we lost touch but had occasional later contact with a few: Coghlan, Harrington, Veale, Bancroft (and Butland and Fletcher were to consider my application to become UNE's Director of External Studies, had Massey U., where I was Director, not persuaded me to withdraw)

6. How was Robb decision making carried out? Did the SCR have much have a say in things?

There were occasional meetings, but much was done informally then executively by the Master. Decisions made by the University about Robb etc, with VC and Registrar, the Master and a couple of senior Fellows were probably more formal.

Was there a Senior fellow in the early 60s SCR committees.

As I remember there wasn't an elaborate committee structure; the Master usually chaired, everyone was equal.

What was Robb like in the early 60s? Food? Tutorials? Living conditions? Amenities Social events?

You should ask the Bindons, Pipers, Obsts, Mellors how it felt for students. What seemed remarkable to me was the attractiveness of the environment within the College and among its courtyards and the respect accorded that by students, many of whom had lived rougher elsewhere. Being in residence made it easier for me to convene a tutorial meeting (the students were from diverse faculties so the agenda was social not instructional); I'd come from a previous situation where I had a tutorial group; and had had an assigned tutor at Oxford but limited contact; so the system (and its variety) was familiar. The catering – we were there before Robb had its own dining hall; my wife Margaret, who had some expertise, was consulted but we left before kitchens and dining room were built – was institutional in style providing for several colleges.

What was Meredith like as a head of college?

Ben Meredith was much respected by Fellows, Tutors and students for his vision and leadership (and not just because of his distinguished military career). He was not an academic but was attuned to the way a college could be much more than a residence, and propagate other but relevant values. He was a bit austere: I remember Jack Obst preferring to take discussion about the powers of the JCR to me as Residential Fellow before going back to Ben with them. And Ben was a 'gentleman': in those days women were not allowed into men's rooms outside certain hours; but it happened; if Ben found them (or me, with his example) he wouldn't rave there and then but would calmly tell the student to take the lady back home safely but see Ben in the morning – when he would be angry. Such matters within the College are rather different now that it is mixed!

Were there many problems for Robb – as a new college?

It wasn't the pioneer college; White College had preceded it, under another interesting leader who was a notable academic. So Robb had some issues – e.g., grandmotherly single Fellows – that it could avoid; and an opportunity to be more imaginative in style without some of the (Newman's Oxford-derived) constraints of 'traditionalism' that probably beset White College. There were for Robb the problems of piecemeal physical growth. And its original ideology as a College was fairly quickly challenged by anti-traditionalists and by 'democratization' of a worldwide and extravagant kind.

The Robb system in the early days (prior to the 3 residential courts being built) included people living in town and other areas, how did the Robb system integrate all these people?

There was a current expectation that notionally at least everyone 'belonged' to a College. Dining together established some integration. The tutorial system was intended to help. Sports and other clubs straddled the various residential units. The 'town house' students were re-housed in temporary on-campus accommodation. My role in the College was largely confined to what went on in the first, then the later courts, so I haven't much memory of the others.

Dr. R. Thornton

Dr.R.Thornton was a Robb man from 1960 to 1962. He commenced his residential career in Wright College and achieved a Rural Science Honours degree in 1963 and later completed a PhD at the University of Western Australia. Here are some of his thoughts about life in Robb and UNE.

I was expelled from Wright College in early 1960 for what was described by the Master (Alan Treloar) as "a flagrant breach of discipline". My sin was failing to wear a coat, tie and gown to dinner and refusing to bow to him a second time; I will admit there were other much more minor indiscretions. The next morning I walked over to the newly opened Robb College and told Cherry Robinson my story; she immediately said "Welcome to Robb College, Tim) and that was that. What a lady she was and what a gentleman

was Ben Meredith? Systems were simple then.

Robb had a completely different atmosphere than Wright; Wright was dominated by a master and staff who was of English origin and who wanted the place to be an “imitation” of Oxford / Cambridge (now deemed Oxbridge, a term that did not exist in the late 1950’s early 1960’s). I regarded the so called Senior Common Room as a bunch of “ (have had to add that word to the dictionary!); who were to be avoided and scorned. Ben Meredith had put an Australian stamp on Robb from Day 1. We men of Robb were of an underdog breed, lesser in social status, but greater in all that mattered. (Who dreamed up this word “Robbers”? it must be part of this unisex / co-ed era, as it was never around in my time).

I can’t remember my room number in 1960 / 61. I left UNE in early 1961 with some sort of “mental breakdown” and returned in 1962 to Room 123, which I also occupied in 1963. This room faced north towards the university proper and over looked a natural amphitheatre. This amphitheatre was a place I had discovered when in 1959 a student (Charlie Wayne?) had shot himself with his CMF issued 303; when searching for him I came upon this amphitheatre for the first time, I didn’t find his body as it was at the bottom of the gully and I went around the top. I always thought this gully could be made into an outdoor theatre, but Charlie’s demise had cast a shadow on the area. With the passage of time this sinister cloud went away and the amphitheatre has come to pass. But who remembers poor Charlie?

If you brought a girl into the College the unwritten rule was that she be escorted. Women roaming the corridors unescorted were frowned upon, and it did embarrass some men. In fact women en mass only came in during WUS Week, but that was part of the fun. Of course bringing a girl into your room was strictly forbidden, but it went on all the time and at all hours, as men will be men and girls will be girls, and ridiculous rules only increase the challenge/ fun.

The best fight was when Laurie Piper and Geoff / Jeff? Paterson had it out in Paterson’s room. Paterson was a tough customer when he had been on the booze and may have eventually been expelled. I could be doing him an injustice in saying that, as he was a star and representative footballer and a nice bloke when he was sober. Piper was severely handicapped, as he had one leg in a full plaster cast, but he had guts. Just who won that fight was never really discussed, but I wanted a rematch when Laurie’s plaster came off. I could tell more stories about Laurie Piper and I’m sure he’d like to hear them, as he was a character.

Characters abounded in Robb’s corridors, but the greatest in my time was Phil Clapam? What became of Phil? Did he drink himself to death before he was 30? Or did he bullshit his way to become a multi millionaire? He sure made a mockery of getting an Arts degree from UNE; his lecture notes for 3 years occupied less than a school exercise book; he always hitched to and from the Melbourne Cup which was just before the exams; but Phil has swallowed the Oxford dictionary and he had an incredible gift with words, spoken or written.

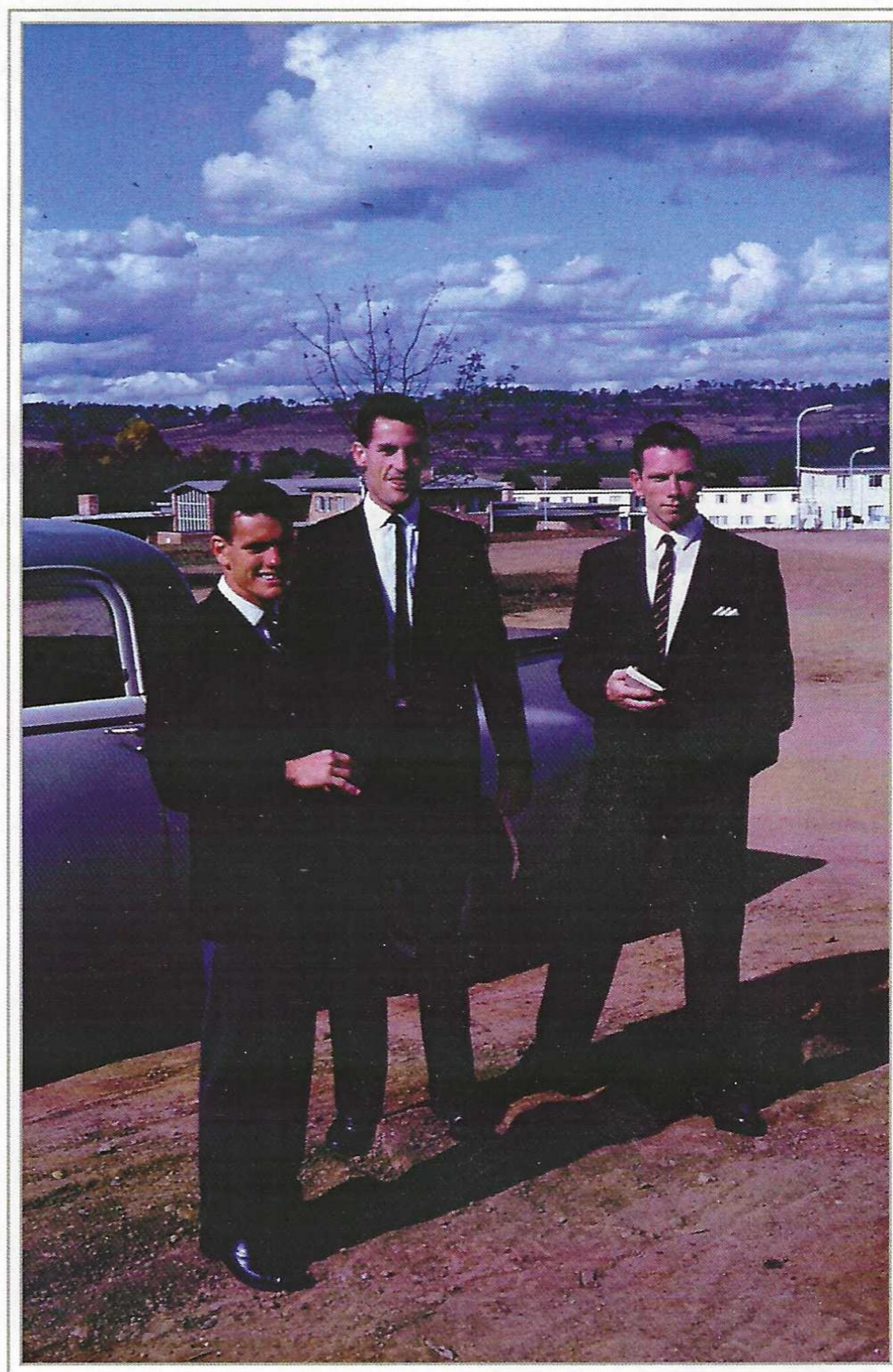


Photo courtesy of Geoffrey Judson. Robb students Dennis Gooley, Brian Kennedy and Tim Thornton.

Written by: Glenn R Druitt B.A.Dip.Ed., B.Soc.Sc (UNE)

<i>Robb Resident</i>	1970-1973
<i>Robb affiliate</i>	1974-1989
<i>Robb SCR</i>	1989-2010
<i>Robb Alumni VP</i>	1981-1982
<i>Robb Alumni President</i>	1982-1985
<i>Robb SCR President</i>	1996-1997