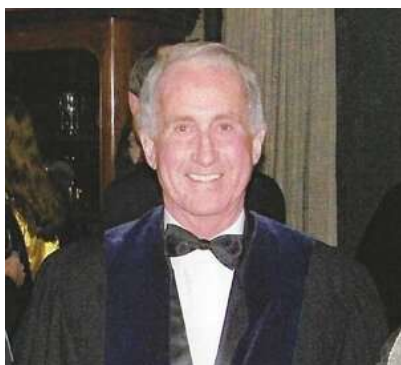


Reflections on Robb College in the 1980s

Dr Jim Irvine, Master: January 1981-December 1990



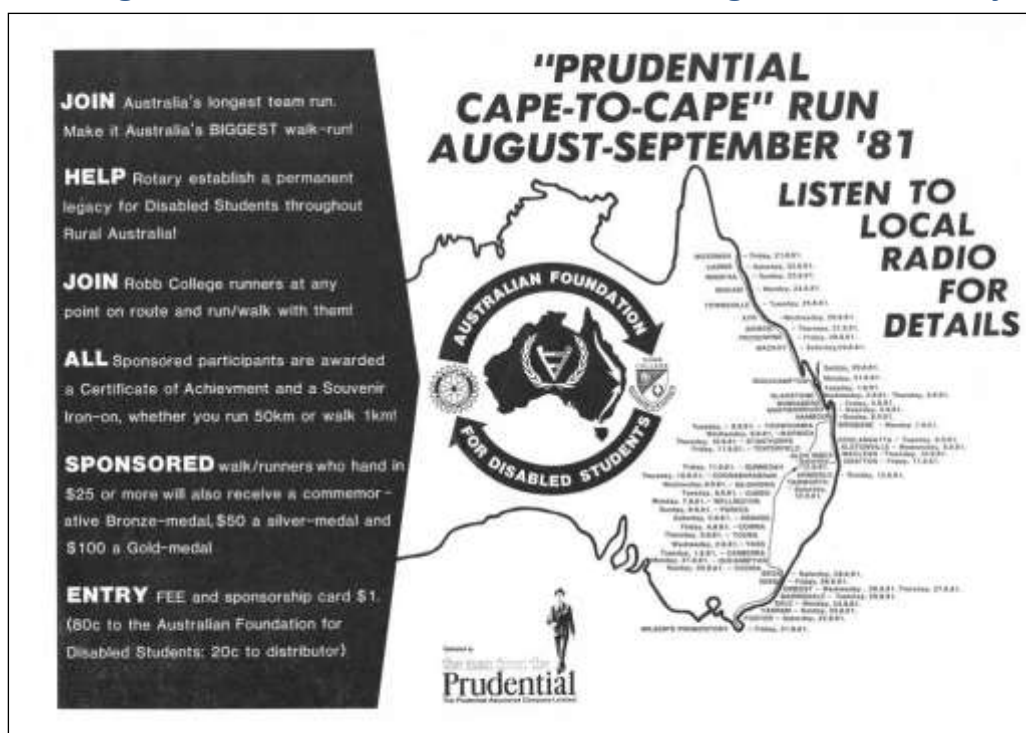
Context of Robb College in the 1980s

By the end of 1980, there were only 106 student residents in Robb, and fewer than 10 were female. At my appointment interview for the position of Master in October 1980, I was left in no doubt that Robb College would be closed if it could not attract and retain enough students to become financially sustainable. With UNE residential College numbers down for the last few years of the 1970s, it had been difficult to do much-needed repairs and refurbishing to make Robb's accommodation attractive.

At my formal appointment meeting in October 1980 with the UNE Vice-Chancellor, Professor Ron Gates, we reached an agreement to initiate a non-refundable Long-Term Maintenance Levy of \$100, over and above residence fees, payable by every Robb resident, enhanced by a matching UNE grant of \$25,000 per year, initially for the years 1981-1985: thereby raising an additional \$50,000+ each year to fund deferred maintenance, replacements and upgrading work. This was a very generous commitment from the VC.

However, this small additional fund each year would not be enough to move the College's occupancy from half-empty to full in one year. Robb needed something dramatic – something appealing to energetic Robb students, creating high visibility for Robb College in rural communities, and showcasing the determination of Robb students to promote their College and UNE.

Evolving the Tradition of an Annual Robb College Charitable Project



JOIN Australia's longest team run.
Make it Australia's **BIGGEST** walk-run!

HELP Rotary establish a permanent legacy for Disabled Students throughout Rural Australia!

JOIN Robb College runners at any point on route and run/walk with them!

ALL Sponsored participants are awarded a Certificate of Achievement and a Souvenir Iron-on, whether you run 50km or walk 1km!

SPONSORED walk/runners who hand in \$25 or more will also receive a commemorative Bronze-medal, \$50 a silver-medal and \$100 a Gold-medal

ENTRY FEE and sponsorship card \$1. (50c to the Australian Foundation for Disabled Students; 20c to distributor)

"PRUDENTIAL CAPE-TO-CAPE" RUN AUGUST-SEPTEMBER '81

LISTEN TO LOCAL RADIO FOR DETAILS

AUSTRALIAN FOUNDATION FOR DISABLED STUDENTS


Prudential

In 1981, the International Year of Disabled Persons (IYDP), we knew of a prospective student, Liz Whittaker, who wanted to come into Robb College, but could not do so because she required wheelchair accessible facilities. Robb had no ramps, disabled-access student-rooms or bath-rooms. Such renovations would need substantial funds. Why not undertake a massive, rural-community-focused International Year of Disabled Persons (IYDP) Project aimed to fund enhanced access work at Robb?

Fortuitously, in 1981, Robb's first female JCR President, Fay Stewart, was a keen sportswoman and Mary Bagnall (MB) Trophy Orienteering champion. Fay persuaded the JCR to support a 'Cape-to-Cape Run' Project to raise funds to launch an Australian Foundation for Disabled Students (AFDS) and enable Liz to live in the College.

An AFDS Constitution was drawn up by local solicitor, Ian Johnstone, with Robb/Rotary as partners, Prudential Assurance as a major sponsor and the UNE as Foundation Trustee until the AFDS became incorporated. The Robb/Rotary partnership is reflected in the logo.

With Rotary District 965 endorsement, local Rotarians Tim Roe (Armidale North Club) and Graham Wyles (Armidale Central Club) liaised with Rotary clubs throughout the proposed running routes to arrange: distribution of local runners' sponsorship cards; a 'meet-the-Robb-runners' and medal-presentation ceremony at 17.00; and overnight billeting for team runners in every community en route. The 'Prudential Cape-to-Cape Run' itinerary, logo and map are attached.



AF correspondence to:
The Secretary,
AFDS,
University of New England,
Armidale
N.S.W. 2351.
(067) 72 2911 ext. 2689

AUSTRALIAN FOUNDATION FOR DISABLED STUDENTS

Education for disabled rural Australians in the least restrictive environment

REVISED SCHEDULE OF PROPOSED ROUTES

<u>Est. Km.</u>	<u>South-North Route</u>	<u>Day/Date</u>	<u>Est. Km.</u>	<u>North-South Route</u>
80	Milson's Promontory	Friday 21. 8.81	76	Mossman
52	Foster	Saturday 22. 8.81	92	Cairns
72	Yarran	Sunday 23. 8.81	166	Innisfail
69	Sale	Monday 24. 8.81	116	Ingham
94	Bairnsdale	Tuesday 25. 8.81	90	Townsville
183	Orbost	Wednesday 26. 8.81	119	Ayr
61	Eden	Thursday 27. 8.81	69	Bowen
113	Bega	Friday 28. 8.81	196	Proserpine
114	Coona	Saturday 29. 8.81	360	Mackay
16	Queenbeyan	Monday 31. 8.81		
60	Canberra	Tuesday 1. 9.81	120	Rockhampton
100	Yass	Wednesday 2. 9.81	120	Gladstone
71	Young	Thursday 3. 9.81	221	Bundaberg
108	Cowpa	Friday 4. 9.81	118	Maryborough
100	Orange	Saturday 5. 9.81	164	Nambour
109	Parkes	Sunday 6. 9.81	111	Brisbane
50	Wellington	Monday 7. 9.81	102	Coolangatta
66	Dubbo	Tuesday 8. 9.81	130	Alstonville
95	Gilgandra	Wednesday 9. 9.81	100	Maclean
105	Coonabarabran	Thursday 10. 9.81	48	Grafton
76	Gunnedah	Friday 11. 9.81	159	Glen Innes
114	Tamworth	Saturday 12. 9.81	100	Armidale
	Armidale	Sunday 13. 9.81		

1,908
Ave. 83 km/day

2,557
Ave. 111 km/day

Tim Roe (Armidale North Rotary Club) and son, Andrew, and Dr John Irvine (ex-UNE) joined the Northern Team, while Prudential executive, John Layton, and his daughters participated actively with the Southern Team. Armidale Prudential's Tom Thomas encouraged Prudential agents in country towns en route to help local Rotarians with publicity and arrangements on the day when the runners came to town. With most Robbers wanting to go north, the Southern Team, led by Fay Stewart, was struggling for starters right up to the final days, until Robb Rugby stalwarts, Jeremy Bennett, Don Farquarson, James Holmes and Gareth Wanford joined the Southern Team. Robb Rugby coach and Resident Fellow, Evan Thomas, and legendary Robb sportswoman and Resident Tutor, Tineke de Boer, led the Northern Team, with Tim Roe undertaking Rotary and community liaison. Reebok Shoes generously supplied every Robb runner with a pair of Reebok shoes.

Two Robb teams ran simultaneously, relay-style, for 24 consecutive days: a Northern Team from Cape Tribulation (north of Mossman, Queensland) back to Armidale (about 2,557 km); while the Southern Team ran from Wilson's Promontory (south of Foster, Victoria) back to Armidale (about 1,908 km). The Northern Team split into two teams for the final week: one running down the coast to Bellingen, then up the Dorrigo Mountain to Armidale; led by Tim and Evan; the other led by Dr John Irvine running inland through Toowoomba, Warwick, Stanthorpe, Tenterfield and Glen Innes (see attached map and table). Some Robb runners chalked up 200+km, and more than \$200 in personal sponsorships. Other Robb students joined in and left at various places en route for both teams.

When distances were too great to reach the next destination in one day, part of each team would be driven ahead to 'leap-frog', by starting their day's running about half-way to the next town, leaving a relay baton to be collected by the rest of the team, who then drove to the evening destination.

The 'Prudential Cape-to-Cape Run' was an unique way to meet wonderful people, see and experience the beauty and variety of Eastern Australia's landscapes, generate interest and publicity for UNE and Robb College, get seriously fit, and raise funds for the AFDS. The Northern Team raised two-thirds of the \$80,000 funds, with the community of Gladstone contributing >\$5,000 on 2nd September 1981.



On 1st September 1981, the Southern Team and supporters were welcomed at a gracious reception in "Yarralumla", hosted by Sir Zelman Cowen (former VC of the UNE, and Governor-General of Australia from 1977-1982) and Lady Anna Cowen (Patron of the AFDS/Cape-to-Cape Run). An official photo (above) includes Lady Cowen and Sir Zelman Cowen, Rotary and Prudential Representatives, with

Robb Team participants (L-R): Fay Stewart; Gareth Wanford; Dave Pratten; Glenys Webster; James Holmes; Dave Irvine; Jim Irvine; Scott Hamilton; Andy Irvine; Jeremy Bennett; James Dunlop; John Andrews; and John Irvine. Armidale Prudential's Tom Thomas is on the extreme right.

During my three-week absence from the College running with the Southern Team, 1981 Senior Resident Fellow, Rex Ward, kindly took on the extra workload as Acting Head to support Fay McGregor and staff to keep the College on track. Resident Tutor, and later Head of Drummond College, Mike Knowling, did a superb job with the willing cooperation of the "Armidale Express" in coordinating publicity for the two teams and communities involved. At that time, before mobiles and the internet, communications were more difficult, yet both teams tried to provide a progress report every day. Everyone appreciated the excellent publicity that was generated throughout the 24-day Run.

When the two running teams met up at the Armidale Post Office on Sunday morning 13th September 1981, after their respective 24-day experiences, there was a great uplifting of spirits. The teams and many supporters then ran the final 5km together along the Armidale-to-UNE Cycleway, where a large crowd – including political, civic and university dignitaries, Robb students and supporters – greeted all the runners as they finished in the courtyard of Robb College, looking fitter and maybe leaner than a few short weeks earlier. After formalities, the College invited all present to enjoy a few quiet ales.

A Formal Dinner at Robb College involving sponsors, supporters, UNE and political representatives and runners was held soon after the Run. Medallions and certificates were awarded to individual participants, and a brass plaque and several framed photos were unveiled in the small JCR outlining the 'Prudential Cape-to-Cape Run' and naming those whose hard work as runners and supporters gave Robb such a great legacy.

By 'O Week' 1982, Robb College was full, Liz Whittaker was enrolled at the UNE and living in West Court, Anne MacKellar was JCR President, Fay Stewart was a Resident Tutor, and the AFDS had \$60,000 in a Sundry Donors Account with the UNE for disabled access initiatives.

In recent years, declining use was made of the funds, so that the combination of limited withdrawals, and compounding interest swelled AFDS Funds to about \$250,000. These Funds were later re-allocated to a UNE Disabled Students' Scholarship Fund which continues with strong Robb College representation.

An Annual Project was undertaken every year thereafter. A new portfolio, Project Officer, was created within the JCR Committee. This tradition continues in Robb College.

Over the period from 1981-1990, philanthropic fund raising efforts raised in excess of \$230,000, but more importantly, from the College's perspective, the various Projects gave valuable organisational experience to all those involved and attracted a great deal of valuable publicity and goodwill towards Robb College and the UNE. Most notable among the Projects for the 1981-1990 period were:

- **The 24-day August-September 1981 Robb / Rotary / Prudential 'Cape-to-Cape Run'** that raised \$80,000 (less \$20,000 costs) to establish an Australian Foundation for Disabled Students.
- **A Robb College ski trip to Lake Ohau in NZ in 1982** (no charity: just great fun).
- **The 1984 Robb College / St Albert's College "Run-For-Your-Life" Project** involving 7 teams of runners, raised \$120,000 in funds (minus expenses) for cancer awareness and research.

- **The 1985 25th Robb College Reunion and Silver Jubilee activities** included a *25th Silver Jubilee* Booklet, edited by Mike Knowing, and a *Robb Rugby -- 25 Years* Booklet, edited by Andrew Wollun and distributed in 1986.
- **The 1987 Guinness Book World Record Game of Continuous Netball**, (41 hours) raised \$3,000 for Rotary's Polio Plus Appeal.
- 1987 also saw the launching the **Robb College Foundation**. This continues as the Robb College Foundation Association within the UNE Foundation.
- **The 1988 Cyclethon** (Armidale-to-Coffs Harbour) raised \$2,500 for local charities.
- **The 1989 Robb Rugby Tour of the British Isles**. Fund raising subsidised players' costs.
- **Annual Art Exhibitions 1988, 1989, 1990** raised at least \$10,000 in combination. Annual Robb College Art Exhibitions continued thereafter. Heith MacKay-Cruise and Leo Jensen were the catalysts for these successful, dignified Projects.
- **The 1990 Guinness Book of Records World Record for the Largest Painting** (WLP - assisted by UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador, Ken Done, and made possible by the artistic contributions of UNE students and students from local Armidale schools). This Project raised \$17,500 towards UNICEF Australia's Robert Nestdale Memorial Appeal for UNICEF's work in Malawi.

The 'Run-For-Your-Life' (RFYL) Project in 1984 deserves special mention. It was a combined Robb College / St Albert's College Project, planned and coordinated by Robb and Albies Resident Tutors, Fay Stewart and Peter Cunich. Extending the 'Cape-to-Cape Run' model, 'Run-For-Your-Life' involved seven teams of sponsored Robb and Albies runners, running through communities from Adelaide to Armidale (coastal and inland routes); Hobart to Armidale; Melbourne to Armidale; and Cairns to Armidale (coastal & inland routes). One team of sponsored runners ran daily around Armidale.

Throughout the RFYL Project, runners were supported en route by Australia's generous CWA ladies. The Project raised more than \$120,000. After expenses, RFYL made generous donations to the respective State Cancer Councils and to the UNE for cancer-related research.

Sir Ninian Stephen (Governor-General of Australia from 1982-1989 and Patron of 'Run-For-Your-Life') came to Robb College on a cold July night in 1984 for a special celebratory Robb/Albies Dinner. Sir Ninian presented medals to all the team members, some of whom had completed more than 300km, and/or raised \$500 or more in personal sponsorships.

With incredible energy, visibility and goodwill generated throughout much of eastern Australia, it was no accident that both Robb and St Albert's Colleges were full-to-overflowing with residents in 1985 and 1986.

The 1990 'World's Largest Painting' Project was suggested and coordinated by 1990 Robb College Junior Common Room (JCR) Projects Officer, Amanda Bishop, and was managed by the 1990 JCR Vice-President, Bill Andreas, with the assistance of students from Robb College, other UNE colleges and local schools, culminating in a marathon effort over six days and nights by John Meredith (Robb Fellow, Rugby Coach and former Robb Foundation Director) to sew all the rolls of painted calico together on the Sports Union's Consett Davis AFL field. **The Painting (below) was a patchwork of 2,747 individually painted 1.5m x 1.5m calico squares, covering 6,727m²: measuring 102.93m by 65.38m, with a superimposed giant 'smiley' face and black border, and stylised Robb and UNICEF crests in the bottom corners.** Seven squares in the centre of the bottom row of individual 1.5m x 1.5m calico squares were painted and signed by Ken Done who flew to Armidale to assist on May 10th 1990.

The photo below shows Bill, Ken and Mandy working on the final seven paintings, while the b/w photo was taken from a fixed-wing plane, as the last seven squares were being painted by Ken and his Robb assistants on the UNE Sports Union AFL field. AFL and soccer goal posts, cars and people walking on the painting show the enormity of the Painting. Local Rotarians measured the painting when completed, confirmed its coverage and authenticity, and assisted the College team to collate an application supported by photographic evidence that was accepted by Guinness Books in the UK as a World Record. A World Record Certificate was proudly displayed in the Robb College Master's Office for many years thereafter.

One of the photos taken from the aeroplane was used by UNICEF Australia as one of its Christmas Card sets for 1990. The card consisted of the Painting on the front, a seasonal greeting inside, plus a caption collated by Ken Done summarising the key dimensions and details of the WLP Painting Project.

This painting is a composite of 2747 individual paintings each 1.5 x 1.5 metre square plus a border with a superimposed smiling face. It has been completed in its entirety in Armidale, NSW by the students of Robb College at the University of New England, with assistance from children at local schools and students from other residential colleges at the UNE.

The World's Largest Painting includes seven 1.5 x 1.5 metre paintings completed on May 10th by Ken Done. Proceeds from the sale of these and from the participation fees will all be given to the Robert Nestdale Memorial Appeal of UNICEF.

Ken Done

Another aerial photo was used to make posters of the Painting. These became collectors' items.

A cheque for \$12,500 was handed to Film Actress and UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador, Audrey Hepburn, in October 1990 in Sydney, by Amanda, Bill and Jim, at a special dinner hosted by UNICEF Australia to welcome Audrey Hepburn and to support UNICEF Australia's Robert Nestdale Memorial Appeal for UNICEF's work in Malawi. A later \$5,000 cheque from Ken Done, donated to UNICEF from his sale of one of the 'Ken Done original' framed squares from the Painting that had been presented to Ken in appreciation of his help and guidance, took the total raised by this Project to \$17,500.





Ken and Judy Done, Amanda Bishop, Vanessa Spark, Jim & Sue Irvine and Bill Andreas returned to Robb in May 2010 for a 20-year-WLP-reunion, with Ken as Guest Speaker at the Parent/Student Dinner and Art Exhibition.

The various 1980s mass-participation, high-visibility charitable Projects gave unique organisational and inter-personal experiences to all the students who participated. They favourably show-cased the UNE and Robb College, gave deeper meaning to 'Fellowship in Learning', and ensured that Robb students became more aware of the work of the various organisations that its philanthropic Projects supported, such as AFDS, Rotary, UNICEF, and state Cancer Councils. Each Project enhanced Robb's reputation, strengthened College esprit, and helped to ensure a full and vibrant College community.

Robb College Sports in the 1980s

With large numbers of men and women students in Robb throughout the 1980s, Robb's record in the Mary Bagnall Trophy (Women's Inter-Collegiate Sports) and President's Trophy (Men's Inter-Collegiate Sports) competitions was outstanding, especially in mass-participation events such as the Run-Swim, Swimming Carnival and Cross-Country Run. As a College, Robb valued its close association with the UNE Sports Union and its Wardens, Gerry Worsell and later Steve Griffith, who were frequent guests at major College functions.

I recall on the lovely October day of the 1989 Cross-Country Run, a visiting US academic was staying in Robb College's Guest Flat. He burst into uncontrollable laughter at the sight of 250 or so Robbers in the main Robb College quadrangle, all miming in slow-motion, with great concentration, and in combo with Jammo (JCR President, Andrew Jamieson, 1989), to the music of the powerful theme from *Chariots of Fire*. Bodies strained and arm and leg movements were simulated, but for one brief period in my time at Robb, the students of Robb were completely silent. This was the big, pre-event 'psych-up', before heading down the hill to the Sports Union, all the while singing unusual songs, probably better not remembered, about other Colleges.

It also helped that Tineke de Boer organised women's MB sports throughout her six-year stay as Resident Tutor (1979-1984). Tineke won 85 sporting glasses – each for a successful win in a MB or UNE representative event – a record unlikely ever to be equalled. The excellent *1985 Robb College Silver Jubilee Booklet*, coordinated and edited by Scottish Rhodes Scholar and long-time Senior Resident Fellow, Mike Knowling, noted on p.33: "To mark the achievement, her friends in College gave Dutch-born Tineke a golden goblet, just in case she ever felt like drinking out of something else for a change."

Women's soccer in Robb College was strong throughout the 1980s. Coached by Mike Knowling, the Robb team consistently won the local competition. Key players, Dr Chris Reading and Resident Tutors Julie Duck and Tineke de Boer represented UNE nationally. Robb was also active in men's and women's soccer, netball, hockey and athletics. Robb had a successful AFL squad that travelled extensively for competition, coached by Dr Brian Hansford, with keen club supporters such as Dr Robert Baker and Dr Jack Makeham. Dr Baker's associations with some of the AFL squad continue to this day.

Throughout the 1980s, Robb College fielded four teams in the New England Zone Rugby competition. Alan Becke, Evan Thomas, John Brady and Malcolm Ross kindly gave a great deal of their time as coaches. Malcolm toured the UK with the 1989 squad – a successful event organised by Meredith Prize Winner and Robb Foundation Director, Andy McConville.



The prestigious NE Rugby Zone Premiership that had eluded Robb for many years was won in a close game against Armidale City in the 1983 Grand Final, with Dave Pratten as Captain, and Resident Tutor, Evan Thomas, as Coach (photo above).

This team and supporters had a wonderful reunion at Woolloomooloo in August 2008 (photo below), still looking great, all recognisable and formidable!



Robb Rugby's Annual 'Picnic Races' were great fund-raisers for the Club in the 1980s. As the Race Meeting progressed, smart punters looked more closely at the eyes of the 'horses' to ensure that they backed only 'clear-eyed stallions' who could handle the vagaries of the amphitheatre track.

The Robb residential complex was close to many excellent sporting facilities provided and maintained by the UNE Sports Union, including; the heated swimming pool and gym in the main complex; football fields for soccer, rugby and AFL codes; tennis, netball, badminton and basketball courts; fitness tracks and the Bellevue Rugby Ground and Cricket / Hockey Oval. Participation among Robb students was encouraged and was clearly a contributing feature of the high level of esprit that existed in Robb College during the 1980s.

Robb College Cultural Activities in the 1980s

Dr R.D.B.(Wal) Whalley's recollections for the *50th Anniversary Booklet* (pp. 9-12) noted the sustained **contributions to drama in Robb College** made by Peter Hall, by TAS legend, Jim Graham, and by Alice Coventry, filling the drama leadership gap left when Mick Sinclair-Wilson completed his term as Master in 1980.

Peter or Jim directed several superb Robb productions, with the support of drama stalwarts including: Mike Knowling, Geoff Perry, Rex Ward, Lisa Middleton, John Temperley, Anna Turnsek, John Nash, Andrew Rodgers, Sally Sholl, Cate Lemann, Katie Keen, Scott Martin, Chrissie Beddoe, Nicky Alexander, Margie Badman, Amanda Bishop, Vanessa Spark, Bill Andreas, Neil Oates, and Andrew Jamieson.

Key 1980s productions were:

- ***This Old Man Comes Rolling Home*** in 1982 – an Australian drama set in Redfern in the 1950s.
- ***The Male Animal*** in 1983 – set in a 1939 university campus context.
- ***Outside Edge*** in 1984 – a cricketing comedy.

- ***Guys and Dolls*** in 1985 – the first of Robb’s big musical productions, co-directed by Peter Hall and Jim Graham, with Errol Russell as Musical Director, a cast of 36, crew of 12, front-of-house team of 6, and culminating in a ‘Full House’ on the final night.
- ***Aunty*** in 1986, written and directed by Jim Graham, as an adaptation of *Charley’s Aunt*. Every time Aunty was introduced, the line was: “This is Charley’s Aunt – from Brazil – where the nuts come from”. Robb’s lead actor then left Robb to pursue an acting career through NIDA.
- ***Dimboola*** in 1987 - the wedding breakfast of Catholic and Protestant guests, set in Dimboola, Victoria, that always goes terribly wrong, with a sterling performance from Geoff Perry as the Priest. “Dimboola” involved the whole audience as its cast. Great fun and a very profitable income-earner for the College.
- ***South Pacific*** in 1989 - featuring the beautiful voice of Amanda Bishop, ably supported by Geoff Perry, Vanessa Spark, Andrew Jamieson, and Armidale’s Claire Keoghan as ‘Bloody Mary’, backed by a powerful cast of nurses and marines -- true to the WWII musical spirit -- and taking its musical energy from Jim Graham and Bill Gleeson. This production played to full houses and had enormous participation from all sectors of the College.
- ***Music Hall*** in 1990 - with all the classic songs and plots of a Jim Graham old-time Music Hall, this Music Hall was specially written for the official opening of the refurbished Armidale Town Hall by the Rt Hon Nick Greiner (NSW Premier 1988-1992). The sell-out Music Hall featured sweet little Nell (Amanda Bishop), big Les (Bill Andreas), understated little Dickie (Mick Owen), evil duo (Vanessa Spark and Geoff Perry), all ably supported by a big, enthusiastic Robb cast. The after-show party was superb, too, with the Premier ‘fully’ involved in the celebrations.

Alice Coventry continued the Robb College drama tradition, directing productions in the 1990s until her untimely death. For all who enjoyed Robb drama, we have so much to thank Mick, Peter, Jim, Errol, Bill, Alice and all who served as cast, orchestra, stage crew, front of house and supporters.

In a supportive, collegiate environment such as Robb College, sporting, cultural, academic and organisational opportunities gave many students chances to excel and to experience life in a collegiate community, while exploring unique paths towards academic and professional careers.

Collegiate Governance in the 1980s

Collegiate governance reflected a different approach to responsibilities and accountabilities to those existing in the 2000s. College Heads were predominantly three-quarter-time appointees, holding five-year, renewable appointments at the Associate Professor level. I was a half-time appointee as Master of Robb, and maintained my UNE teaching, supervisory and clinical commitments.

Heads were accountable for their respective College. We worked very closely with UNE Budget, Finance, Supply and Properties sections, and with other College Heads. Heads of Colleges met regularly and served as the Directors of the Campus Conference Centre.

Mr Allan Huggins (Page), Dr Alan McKenzie (Austin), Dr Joe Massingham (Wright), Mrs Edwina Ridgway (Duval), Mrs Jill Spilsbury (Mary White) and Mr Mike Knowling (Drummond) were kind and helpful colleagues and friends. After more than thirty years of outstanding service, Edwina was awarded an Order of Australia (A.M.) for her leadership within the UNE College system.

All College Heads reported directly to the Vice Chancellor, whom we met over lunch as a group once every month to discuss collegiate and governance issues. St Albert's College Master, Fr. Kevin Saunders, appointed by the Catholic Church, also participated actively. Several Heads maintained ongoing academic or outside professional commitments.

Fortunately, throughout the 1980s, I had the continuity, dedication and administrative support of Mrs Fay McGregor as Administrative Assistant, ably supported part-time by Rhonda Stachiw. We had a competent and caring Housekeeping team led by Shirley Bourke, and involving Marg Jackson, Joy Hunter, Beryl McCann, Claudia Cooper, Nonie Lasker, Les Austin and Charlie Pope, with Cam Bastow attending to maintenance. Fay served Robb College for more than 25 years. Charlie was always smiling as he worked, unless someone mentioned roosters!

Robb College Academic Support and Traditions in the 1980s

The focus on scholarship and traditions was enhanced every year by a dedicated team of Resident Tutors. Resident Tutors were not disciplinarians but scholarly mentors whose primary duties centred around guiding and supporting undergraduate students. They participated actively in College life. Robb also benefited greatly by the academic and personal mentoring contributions of an increasingly diverse and expanded Senior Common Room (SCR), throughout the 1980s. The SCR made special efforts to involve more female academics and leaders. This was a deliberate policy to reflect the increasing year-by-year enrolments of female students, to the point where, by 1990, a reasonable gender balance had been established among Robb College residents.

Robb took pride in the strong academic support provided every year by the team of carefully selected post-graduate students serving as Resident Tutors, coordinated by outstanding Senior Resident Fellows: Evan Thomas, Rex Ward, Mike Knowling, Julie Duck, Ric Yelf and Mic Coonan, ably supported by an academically balanced team of Resident Tutors. In addition to in-College tutorials and seminars, SCR members also gave considerable time as academic mentors for students seeking career advice or extra help. Dr Gordon MacAulay introduced computer skills courses, initially using those tiny upright Mac computers of the late 1980s that had 1MB floppy-disk storage, a screen that was smaller than an A4 page, and looked like something out of *Dr Who*.

Formal dinners, where academic gowns were worn, were held every week during academic term, with SCR members and JCR affiliates welcomed as guests of the College. Formal dinners recognised outstanding academic, sporting and cultural achievements (e.g. winning PT and MB events, contributing to debating teams, taking major roles in drama productions), and were followed by a debate, guest speaker, quiz, musical evening, talent night or dance.

Special events, such as the Scottish, Hawaiian and Medieval Nights, and the annual Academic, Graduands', Valedictory, Sports and Change-over Dinners, were highlights of the academic year.

Scottish, Hawaiian and Medieval Nights were staged occasionally by the College, as social events providing an opportunity for students to take some time out from studies when imminent examination periods began to create anxieties. Scottish Nights were accompanied by mandatory Scottish dress and menus, nominal Clan Tables, Table Decorations and Clan Motto, piping-in of the haggis, highland dancing, reels, tossing the caber, and all manner of 'blather' by 'cardboard Scots'. Mike Knowling stood alone as the real McCoy!

At one memorable Scottish night, as captured below, Rex Ward and Peter Hall had invited some FMRC guests, viz. a group from Nigeria, who defined their 'Clan' and 'Motto' as: "We are Clan McLagos and we are full of Scotch". Enlightened Robb participants appreciated the distinctions among the terms Scots, Scottish and Scotch. Scotch and McLagos indeed!



Such traditions and the inclusion of guests came at a cost to the College, but these costs were more than offset by low College administration costs, and the goodwill generated by dignified formal events that involved various sectors of the College: residents; affiliates; fellows; tutors; staff and guests.

External student residential schools and conference profits were used to subsidise the fees payable by full-time students. Several times during the 1980s, the College started the academic year with overflowing numbers waiting to be residents, reaching peaks in 1985 and 1986. There is nothing like a full College to generate goodwill, collegiality and UNE support.

During vacations, student rooms accommodated external students. Some Residential School course coordinators chose to use the teaching facilities in the College for the greater convenience of students. When residential schedules permitted, mature-age students staying at Robb were invited to take part in formal dinners, sampling something of what it means to be part of Robb's 'Fellowship in Learning' traditions. For a few years in the 1980s, we had bottles of almost undrinkable, Robb-bottled 'Toggam' and 'Tellum' wines for sale to external students as mementos at the College Office. We implored externals not to buy these wines, yet all vanished in due course. Hopefully, what we cellared for the next major reunions will be of higher quality.

Throughout the 1980s, Robb housed the UNE Sports Union-sponsored annual summer camps for Rugby Union, Soccer and sometimes Netball. Conference business was pursued, capitalising on the quality of Robb's catering, with dedicated staff such as Patrick Keaton, Rodney Pearson, 'Big Sue' (Sue Court) and 'Little Sue' (Susie Edmonds) always doing the near-impossible to cater for the huge functions and numbers.

After serving 250+ at a big function, the kitchen team would be invited into the hall to the applause and genuine gratitude of the whole College for going beyond the call of duty. Public appreciation did much more to cement loyalties and provide quality services than all manner of centre-driven, economic consolidation schemes that were imposed more recently. Methinks a College needs to dine

together, especially in a post-COVID world, and clever schemes to offer partial catering often result in over-use of court kitchenettes and fewer opportunities to interact.

Unreliable Reflections on the 1980s

When I think back to those 10 memorable years in Robb, I feel overwhelmed by the depth of support and genuine friendships that were characteristic of Robb College in the 1980s. In our post-Robb lives working in Asia from 1992-2004, Sue and I lost touch with many great friends and colleagues from our days at Robb. We regret losing contact and have appreciated opportunities such as the annual UNE Rural Focus Week, special College functions and miscellaneous alumni events to re-establish those friendships and continue our history of 'Fellowship in Learning'.

I wish to pay special tribute to the leadership of the JCR and SCR during the 1980s. Without exception, the leadership teams of these two vital bodies within the College were committed and effective. Resident Tutoring teams and every JCR President from Scott Hamilton in 1980 to Emma Ridley in 1990 and their Committees were outstanding. Every JCR President in the 1980s was an outstanding leader and it was an honor to work closely with each Committee. Every team was different, but each brought great credit to the College through the initiatives within the various JCR portfolios.

As earlier noted, Resident Tutors were not involved as court disciplinarians. Disciplinary matters were handled by the JCR House Committee, consisting of JCR Executive and Court Vice-Presidents, who showed a commitment to high standards, balanced with understanding of what it is to be a student in a residential community. House Committee decisions were invariably just and thoughtful, ensuring that sincere apologies and compensation or loss of privileges where necessary, kept isolated acts of thoughtlessness and immaturity in perspective, without blotting anyone's career prospects or the College's reputation.

Classic examples of sensitive handling of 'student pranks' included the 20 or so 'Armidale-mall-loiterers' who were accommodated for one memorable night at the Armidale Police Station lock-up. They were not charged. A delegation of this group returned somewhat more scrubbed up later in the day to formally thank the police for their thoughtful handling of a potentially volatile situation. The 'gnome-nappers' likewise returned the gentleman's little 'family', apologised in person and in writing and were later cautioned by an understanding magistrate. All involved are now older and wiser. The Armidale Police in the 1980s were very understanding of the occasional student prank or indiscretion!

Dr Wal Whalley, Dr John Corbett, Dr Max Webster, Dr Gordon MacAulay, Dr Ian McIntosh, Dr Harry Martin, Drs Robert and Carolyn Baker and Mr Frits Diehl gave much time to the SCR, as did Mr Neville Young, the first Chairman, and Mr Frits Diehl, the first Treasurer of the Robb College Foundation, after it was established in 1987 with the help of 1960s resident and JCR Committee Member, Brian Abbott, a local solicitor.

I cannot thank enough Dr Wal Whalley and Pam Whalley for their unflagging loyalty and support to Robb for more than 50 years, and, at a personal level, for Wal's thoughtful leadership at various times as Senior Fellow, SCR President, and Foundation Chairman / Vice-Chairman, and as a kind and thoughtful friend throughout my time as Master of Robb College.

To Sue, and our sons, Andy and Dave, I offer through these unreliable recollections above, my thanks and abiding love for your support, contributions and patience throughout our ten years at Robb College. Being school-aged adolescents in a University College environment was not easy for Andy and

Dave in many ways. Sue's willing involvement in the life of the College was outstanding. Her dignified presence and thoughtful attention to detail enabled guests of the College to feel welcome at formal functions. Her professional and life experience were often tapped into by female residents seeking advice, and as a guest speaker at court luncheons. Sue willingly entertained College guests and student groups at the Residence and helped in so many ways to ensure that our living within the College environment contributed as far as possible to a stable family life. In hindsight, nothing was more important, yet as I reflect on those ten precious years, I know that I failed to effectively manage work-life/family-life balance. I am pleased that Andy and Dave learned from my imbalanced focus on work. They are great Dads, as well as being outstanding in their respective lines of work: Andy as an engineer and Dave as a Builder.

Are there lessons from the 1980s that prompt me to comment on the future of Robb College?

I admired the level of mutual trust that existed among the College Heads and with the VC to whom each of us was accountable. There were no middle-level managers or filters, and in the case of Robb College, the Advisory Committee represented the key sections of the College and served as a good sounding board and overarching Committee that helped steer a sound course with regard to the various aspects of College life and management that needed to be balanced.

Reflecting on the built environment, improvements were made every year in the 1980s to enhance safety, access, functionality and attractiveness within the residential and common areas of Robb College. In its buildings, traditions, calendar and membership, Robb College was different from all the other Colleges. In fact, every College was different but the diversity of buildings, facilities, services and traditions among the UNE Colleges of the 1980s, in my opinion, was one of the UNE's greatest attributes. I find it hard to contemplate the UNE as a regional Australian university without a strong and vibrant residential college system, united in its commitment to excellence, within an overarching rural focus.

Robb has reached a critical point in its evolution. With the current resident student body occupying the former Drummond College buildings, the demolition and material removal of the three former Robb College residential courts (South Court, North Court and West Court) at the original Meredith Drive site, and the complexities now facing all universities due to the Corona Virus pandemic, Robb College is currently a community of people that must encourage UNE to build the proposed new Robb College accommodation blocks when circumstances and finances permit, as an integral part of a strong residential system.

It is perhaps more important in 2020 – the 60th year of Robb College – than in any previous era, that the widespread Robb College alumni and friends of the College provide support to all efforts to strengthen the Robb College Foundation Association, capably led by former Robb resident student, Resident Tutor, 'thrilling thespian and chanteur extraordinaire' and respected leader within the wider Robb College community, Geoff (Pez) Perry. Geoff's visionary and tireless efforts as Robb College Foundation Association Chairman have resulted in an excellent Robb College Scholarship Programme. Geoff and the Directors are working hard to ensure its expansion and self-sustainability.

A strong Foundation Association and a full and vibrant residential student membership are key attributes that will strengthen the urgency to rebuild. I would like to think that the UNE will re-build residential Courts that are more functional, environmentally more sustainable, more attractive and

built to higher standards than the original Courts, while maintaining the architectural features such as the courts and courtyards that gave Robb its distinctiveness.

New purpose-built residential courts in the current global climate must encompass quality and sustainability principles, to minimise Robb's environmental footprint and serve as models of architectural design, functionality and construction excellence.

Beyond the buildings and facilities, it has always been the esprit among members of Robb College that I have admired most and tried to foster during the 1980s. "Fellowship in Learning" remains an important vision for Robb College as a residential community of scholars: as important today as it has been throughout the past 60 years.

When UK, European and US Colleges boast hundreds of years of tradition and ongoing substantial financial support, it is not unreasonable to see a future Robb College that will persist for hundreds of years within its uniquely Australian context.

October 2020.