

## **ADDRESS AT MILNER AND HOBSON HOUSES BIRTHDAY TEA**

**25 August 2007**

The Hall Warden, House Wardens, past and present students of Hobson and Milner Houses, ladies and gentlemen

Thank you for your presence this morning to celebrate Milner House's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday and Hobson House's 40<sup>th</sup> birthday. It is a first for Rhodes University to have two residences within one Hall to have the important milestones of 40<sup>th</sup> and 80<sup>th</sup> birthdays in the same year, as well as for one to be half the age of the other!

Hobson House opened in 1967 as a one-house Hall. It was named after Sam Hobson who was a teacher and then an official in the Cape Provincial Department of Education. He was also an author of some renown, having won the Hertzog Prize for literature and was a Member of the Executive Council of the Cape Province. Sam Hobson's major contribution to Rhodes University was his position as the first chairman of Rhodes University Council, a position that he held from 1951 to 1965.

The first warden of Hobson House was Prof. Winifred Maxwell, a long serving professor of history. She was much loved, feared and respected by colleagues and students alike.

Until 1974, Hobson Hall (really the House) stood on its own as an independent unit. Students both lived and dined in the house. In that year, the just-built Dingemans House and the new, separate dining hall were added and Hobson House became a component of the expanded Hall.

The first Hall Warden of this expanded Hobson Hall was Mrs. Shirley Gadd, daughter of the late Sam Hobson, a link to the past which was both appreciated and respected. Shirley was Hall Warden of Hobson Hall and

warden of Hobson House for 15 years from 1974 to 1988. It is really good to have Mrs Gadd here today to join us in the celebration.

Milner House is by far the oldest of the buildings in Hobson Hall. Milner was built in 1926-7 and was an independent building for half a century. Milner House is named after Lord Alfred Milner, a governor of the Cape, and reflects the historical relationship between the university and the Cape government.

Milner was opened as the third house at Rhodes for men and was changed into a hall for women in 1959. It was administratively attached to Hobson Hall in 1979 when the University attempted to bring all halls to approximately the same size.

We have had good wishes sent by two or three men who lived in Milner in the 50s. One of them tells a story of how they used to sail down the stairs in an old tin bathtub – Milner students please don't even think of trying this!

Here is the recollections of one Gerald Rosendorff who arrived in 1946.

As a 16-and-a-half-year-old first year student, I arrived at Grahamstown Station from Bloemfontein by train. The train from Alicedale to Grahamstown had to negotiate some fiercely steep gradients en route. For this reason and due to the extra weight of this student train, we would virtually come to a standstill on a hill and most of the students would alight and run along the side of the train, until the incline had been conquered.

In those days, the whole of the ground floor of Milner consisted of two large common rooms and because of the scarcity of accommodation, the one on the left had been converted into a large dormitory, housing 10 'Inks'. (Definition of an 'Ink' being: "the lowest form of human life"!)

All meals were provided down the road in Drosdy Hall, as the Smuts Hall dining room did not exist.

The evening meal was formal and one was denied entry if one arrived late. Jackets, ties and academic gowns were obligatory. We sat at long tables.

We were harassed, mainly by drunken ex-servicemen who would simply pop their heads inside the door and bellow "INK" at all hours of the day and night. We were expected to get up immediately and stand to attention and await further commands.

So passed my first year at RUC and during my second and third years I was very happy to have my own room in Milner House, where I had a most enjoyable sojourn and made many good friends.

Another Rob Courtenay(1958)recalls

I was a 'fresher' in 1958, having been out of school for a few years. It was decided in that year to house all the freshers together, probably under the illusion that we'd have less of an undesirable influence on the 'Inks' if we were isolated from them.

Milner House was where I, and the other 'men of the world', were accommodated. This experiment was not to be repeated after that single trial year – the anticipated discipline exercised by this slightly older student body simply was not evidenced.

Our warden for that year was Andrew Milne, a kindly, white-haired professorial type, who took his duties very seriously. Unfortunately he became the victim of some of our pranks.

One such prank involved the borrowing of a donkey from an old man. We bribed the old man to let us

take his animal for the night, promising to return it the next day. He reluctantly agreed and with the help of a few other housemates we led it back to Milner House late at night. As quietly as we could, using a carrot and stick approach, we coaxed the beast up the stairs into the building and then into the common room, quickly closed the door behind it and sneaked back to our rooms. We could hardly contain our mirth waiting for the reaction in the morning from Prof Milne, who was such a stickler for tidiness in the common room.

Well, we didn't have to wait too long. Long before my usual wake- up time my door was thrust open and I was confronted by an obviously very angry warden. What did I know about the donkey he demanded? In my most self-righteous and innocent manner I declared I did not know what he was talking about, and, in fact, I wanted to know why he should approach me in such an accusing fashion.

The common room was in total chaos with carpeting scuffed, furniture pushed around, and much evidence of the animal having relieved itself. In the cold light of day it didn't look like such a clever prank after all.

The outcome was a formal charge by the police of a group of us, with the option to pay a fine of about £15 pounds (this was before the days of Rands and cents).

I was surprised at the time that the police even bothered to pursue the case. Although the police had absolutely no respect for the old complainant, they disliked Rhodes students even more.

That's enough of the recollections and history. Let's cut the cakes and have tea in celebration of the two birthdays.