

## **THE BIRTH OF THE ASSOCIATION IN UK**

*By Peter E Perera- (The Founder President.)*

Some of us Old Joes who were here in London as students in 1960 formed an informal Association of Old Joes at the Catholic International Chaplaincy at Holland Park. I recall Michael & Lalin Fernando, Gamini Don Michael and Spencer Anthony were members then, also Fr Peter A Pillai who visited us in London at that time, celebrated Mass at the Chaplaincy.

Some years later, when a few of us returned to the UK, a chance remark at a social gathering, between Suranganee, wife of my Josephian colleague Holsey Gomez and my wife Manique, prompted the first gathering at an informal dinner which took place at the Cumberland Hotel in Marble Arch in 1982. Amongst the attendees at the dinner were the former Josephian Cricket Captain Neil Weerasinghe and several other distinguished Old Joes from Colombo who traveled here as part of the Sri Lankan Presidential delegation for the Commonwealth exhibition.

As the word spread the numbers grew and several dinners later a bigger gathering met at the Ceylon Tea Centre in Piccadilly. Some 80 Old Joes and their wives attended the occasion and by a unanimous decision I was invited to officially lead the formation of the New Association. One of the primary objects of the articles of the Constitution was, in consultation with the Rector, to assist the College in its most urgent needs. The Inaugural Dinner Dance held in the Carlisle Suite at the Cumberland Hotel, Marble Arch in 1988, turned out to be a resounding success with 275 guests present.



*The Cumberland Hotel Marble Arch, where the Inaugural Dinner Dance was held in 1988.*

The Rector at that time, Rev Fr Stanley Abeysekera had built a new Science Block but lacked the funds to equip the Physics and Chemistry Laboratories. The money that was raised at the Cumberland Hotel Dinner Dances was set aside for equipping the new Labs from a leading supplier of School equipment in the UK. These were then shipped to the College. The benefit of having first rate Labs was certainly reflected in the succeeding years. The A level results in the Science subjects were excellent, with no less than 12 students per year obtaining top results in the A level exams.

The next Project was to assist and equip the College Brass Band. Dinner Dances held at the Selfridge Hotel and Skyline Heathrow Hotel raised sufficient funds to fully equip the Band. It is noteworthy that the College Band has since won the All Island Brass School Band competition several times.

Contributions were also made towards the New Sports Complex at the College.

Next was a more ambitious project of building a Radio and Satellite Communications Laboratory in memory of the late Fr Ignatius Perera. Subsequent Dinner Dances held at the Langham Hilton, Portland Place W2 in 1993, 94 and 95 raised funds to fully equip a Radio Station and Electronics Lab at the Bonjean Hall Tower Block, manned with state of the art equipment which continues to be used in Satellite Tracking & Radio communications and training for students at all levels. The annual fund raising Josephian walk and the Annual "International Scouts Jamboree on the Air" are run from the Radio Centre manned by students and teachers.

The biggest social Event for the Old Joes in the UK was the **Centenary Dinner Dance** held at the Langham Hilton, in 1995. It was a truly memorable event in which we even received a special message from **Her Majesty the Queen**. The one time great pace bowler and College Cricket captain Rev Fr Joe De Mel was present to add a touch of nostalgia to the evening. Also present were Niranjan Deva Addittya, MP and currently a Member of the European Parliament and several other notable personalities. This event was a spectacular one, remembered for its elegance, sophistication and conviviality

The Joe-Pete matches and participation in the Festival of Cricket, led for many years by the current President Victor Wickramasinghe, have been prominent sporting events and continue to this day.

If I may, on a personal note, add that one of the most ardent, consistent and colourful member over the many years, from its very inception has been Mr. Cuthbert Charles and his wife. Cuthbert Charles has always been a pillar of strength for every cause he has supported and he has especially come from his overseas posting in India to be present here tonight.

I wish the current President Mr. Victor Wickramasinghe a successful tenure in office and hope that under his guidance the Association will continue to assist the College.

## **PAST PRESIDENTS**

|             |                       |
|-------------|-----------------------|
| 1988 & 1989 | Peter Perera          |
| 1990 & 1991 | Anton Karunaratne     |
| 1992 & 1993 | Cuthbert Charles      |
| 1994 & 1995 | Hilary Soyza          |
| 1996 & 1997 | Thalath Ismail        |
| 1998 & 1999 | Lakshman Malawana     |
| 2000 & 2001 | Indra Rajaratnam      |
| 2002 & 2003 | Rohana Eliatamby      |
| 2004 & 2005 | Pathman Tambimuttu    |
| 2006 & 2007 | Victor Wickramasinghe |