

**Glebe District Hockey Club  
Annual Seniors Presentation Night  
Saturday 23 September 2023**

At: Wests Ashfield Leagues Club,  
115 Liverpool Rd, Ashfield NSW 2131

## **Under the Arches**

***Max Solling (OAM), Australian urban and sports historian***

I enjoyed writing *Under the Arches, A History of Glebe District Hockey Club to 1993*, with my friend, Dr Harry Wark, the club historian. Many people were involved in production of the book. It was very much a community effort, with everyone contributing their services free. Eddie Crook, then club secretary, designer and typesetter, Anne Wark proof reader and Marilynne Smith also proof reader, and as editor, making it a better book. A wonderful collection of photographs contributed by club stalwarts enhanced the book together information provided by some eighteen players identified in the Acknowledgements.

In the 1980s with my two young boys we joined supporters on the sidelines at Jubilee Oval on Saturday afternoon to enjoy the theatre of warring suburban tribes doing battle on the hockey field. The standard of Glebe's play made the game a spectacle, entertaining and sociable for barrackers. I particularly enjoyed watching Pat Nilan, always heavily marked, Geoff Paterson and Robert Wark. At the oval I met club secretary Fred Letts, expressed an interest in the club's traditions, and not long after I received a rich lode of club hockey records from Fred to explore.

Writing a club history that began in 1931 with the arrival of Brother Maurice Macartan Keegan was not without certain constraints. Harry and myself were heavily reliant on two sources – club records, and those of the Association, together with oral contributions, rich reminiscences of countless players who breathed life and colour into the game. Newspaper coverage of Sydney suburban hockey from the mid-1950s had greatly diminished, and other published hockey club histories were as scarce as hen's teeth and still are.

Brother Macartan Keegan, a Patrician Brother from Galway, Ireland was the spark that led to the formation of the Glebe club on 20 December 1932. Formerly a brilliant back for the All Indian Hockey team, Macartan as a great mentor, bequeathed a rich legacy to the club. What the club lacked in financial resources in its embryonic years was more than made up for in a tenacious fighting spirit and camaraderie on which a phenomenal record on the sporting field was built.

Glebe in the 1930s and 1940s remained heavily industrialised, with 164 factories, and overtly working class in its demographic profile – 70% to 80% were renters, raising large families on single incomes. Life in Glebe was characterised by neighbourhood networks and extended kinship. The club drew its strength from strong ties with families developing social networks that revolved around the club. It was a matter of great pride for a young player growing up in Glebe to pull on a hockey guernsey and being part of the team. It was in this social milieu that enduring bonds of friendship were forged.

First graders, after their best playing days were over, stayed on to strengthen lower grade teams with their experience. As they ran onto the fields, some tucked their false teeth into their socks. They were there to uphold local traditions, to coach juniors, and most important, after the game, socialise under the arches.

Glebe fielded their first junior team in 1948 when Glebe accommodated 20,510 residents and club members believed there should be no fees for juniors to play. It reflected an egalitarian spirit that is part of the club's DNA; it was an exemplary example of a community club. The Glebe club did not just exist for playing hockey. The social side of the club was about making friends, building communities, sharing experiences, strengthening collective life.

## Guest speech

Combined conviviality and spontaneous competition on the playing field was at the heart of sport, drawing individuals into social relationships, fun and friendship embracing dinners, dances and barbecues, and refreshments under the arches.

Glebe won the first of their many first grade premierships in 1940. Three years earlier Tommy Pearce and Basil Bates became Glebe's first Australian representatives.

Glebe emerged as the dominant Sydney hockey club during the Second World War and post-war era, winning the Sydney club championship twenty nine times between 1948 and 2006, and also won the MHA and Sydney Hockey Association's first grade premiership twenty eight times between 1940 and 2008, and with their rich pool of talent at this time became second grade premiers on twenty one occasions, and third grade premiers twenty two times to 2008.

The club website has been very well served by biographies of life members and other prominent players written by Mark Paterson and Dr Harry Wark together with a club history section.

Women's hockey first emerged in Glebe in 1931, 1932 and 1933 under the guise of St James Sporting Club. After a hiatus of 45 years, Glebe women fielded two teams in 1978 and continued to compete in various competitions to 1989. Women's teams were re-established as part of the Glebe club in 1990. Melissa Newton, who began with the Minkey squad, reached her 500<sup>th</sup> game this season, the first Glebe woman to do so, and eleven other Glebe women, Helen Howe, Carole Wark, Louise Tapsell, Amy Wark, Kylie Lawson, Rebecca Howe, Ann Rochester, Kate Gleeson, Josie Barron, Kate Pearsall and Angela Wark have currently played over 250 games.

The sheer number of games played by some Glebe men is extraordinary; Les Wark 816 games, Harry Wark senior 757, George Manou 729, Stephen Casey 721, Martin Howe 712, Peter Busch 676, Colin Brown 660, Danny O'Brien 644, Dr Harry Wark junior 643 and Peter Howe 641. Among their many champion Australian and State players are two triple Olympians, inside left and Glebe playmaker Pat Nilan (1964, 1968, 1972) with 86 internationals and full back Ken Wark junior (1988, 1992, 1996) playing for Australia on 214 occasions.

Glebe has continued to be a fertile breeding ground for champion hockey players. In 2023 it has over 200 juniors playing, a great tribute to a vibrant community club. The first junior boys team played in 1948, and the girls started in junior competitions from 1976. Lisa Williams was the first junior girl to play for Glebe. The juniors are the future of the game.