

ANNEXURE A

4 August Chapel/Assembly 125 Celebration – Mr Paul Fleischack, Senior Deputy Rector

It is indeed a privilege and a pleasure to be part of this milestone in the history of the school.

As we reflect on the founding of Michaelhouse, I would like to share with you three themes:

The school's beginning in Pietermaritzburg

Why we are in Balgowan today

Who was James Cameron Todd

Before I start I would like to thank Mr Gary Ralfe, for much of what you are about to hear is taken from his work as he writes the latest edition of the History of Michaelhouse.

So, firstly, to the beginning:

In the late 1800's there was an opinion amongst, probably the wealthy and educated in the community, that many colonists had become somewhat rough since they left the civilized shores of England, and so many parents were sending their sons back to England to be educated as gentlemen.

An earlier attempt to open an Anglican school for boys in Pietermatitzburg, similar to St Andrews or Bishops, had failed after a few years.

125 years ago today a 33 year-old Anglican priest and his team of three men and one woman opened the doors to Michaelhouse, in what was then Loop Street (now Jabu Ndlovu Street).

Undaunted by the failure of the earlier school, Todd set started Michaelhouse with the following four conditions:

- i) That the head should be a clergyman of the Church of England.
- ii) That the backbone of the education should be classics and Maths.
- iii) That athletic sports should be compulsory and under supervision.
- iv) That a training in the manners of a gentleman should be a matter of the first consideration.

Fifteen boys joined the new school, ten boarders and five-day boys who were accommodated in two rented houses, one for classes and the other for dormitories.

The staff comprised Cameron Todd himself, Messrs Tyron, Dobree, Rigby and Mrs Jackson, the dormitory matron. They were soon joined by Mr Hannah who worked on and off for Michaelhouse for the next thirty odd years, and after whom Hannas field is named.

What was life like for those 15 Boys?

Ken Gordon, in a letter to his parents, written on 14 August 1896, just 10 days after the opening of the school. Gives us this insight:

“My dear Father

I hope you are quite well. We went up to see Mother and Baby this afternoon. In was raining here last Saturday. We got our over-coats today. We play Rugby here a boy called Still is Captain he sued to go to Hilton so he can play the game well, Still got hurt the first game he played here, so he has not been able to play since, but I think he will be able to play next

ANNEXURE A

week. There are 15 boys at this school 10 of which are boarders. I like this school much better than Merchiston House. We get nice food, have nice beds and I like it better altogether. We have to play Rugby 3 times a week whether we like it or not. With my love to all.

I am, your loving son, Ken”

Ken claims to be the first Michaelhouse boy to get a hiding. “At table one morning someone asked for the butter to be passed down to him. No-one hears, so Ken shouted out “Pass the cart-grease down here.” After the meal he was called into the Office and Todd asked him what he had done wrong. Ken was totally confused, he’d no idea what the Rector was referring to. Todd explained that in referring to Mrs Jackson’s butter as ‘cart-grease’ he, Ken, had offended her and he was to apologise to her, after which he was to report back to the Office. While Ken went off to search for the Matron, who incidentally, wasn’t the least bit fussed, Todd quickly sent someone out to purchase a cane. On his return, Ken as given six-of-the-best, a handshake and finally dismissed.

And later, in his memoirs, Arthur Wallbridge who joined the school in 1899 shares this:

Being a new school there was a certain amount of jealousy from older schools, e.g. Maritzburg College and Hilton College. We were considered upstarts by the local Government School boys in the town who christened us “Whiterats.” This nickname originated from the colour of our hatbands. In retaliation the “enemy” were nicknamed “Mudrats.” a feud developed and several “incidents” took place.

One such altercation between Ross and a friend vs. a couple of “Mudrats” resulted in the defeat of the latter one of who on returning home complained to his big brother.

The sequel was that one evening a few days later “big brother” came on to the cricket field just as we had finished playing and wanted to know which chap had beaten up his young brother.

Ross did the interviewing and a properly conducted scrap took place, with seconds and referee, “behind the pavilion,” where our disputes were usually settled.

Ross won all right and then we all made a fuss of the big brother who had walked into the “Whiterats” den. He appreciated his fair treatment and departed good friends.

St Michael’s Day (29 September) was a high day on the school calendar. Boys were given the morning off school and prize giving was held in the afternoon.

On St Michael’s eve in 1897 boarders were allowed out to attend a show in the theatre in town. They weren’t much impressed by the play, a melodrama, and more concerned about there being supper on their late return.

The following morning six boys cycled to Edendale, four got there, two did not. The rest of the boarders went either to the botanical gardens or stayed to help arranging the room for prize giving.

The following day, St Michael’s day festivities included a cricket match between boarders and day boys. The day boys were more numerous and won.

ANNEXURE A

So why are we celebrating the birthday of the school here in Balgowan?

One year after opening, the numbers had grown to 42: 19 boarders and 23 day boys. Todd knew that the school would need larger premises and he also wanted to move the school away from the negative influences of the town and so started the search for a site to which the school would be moved.

As soon as 1898 the Chronicle records: “Where the new Michaelhouse will be no-one at present can say: possibly at Camperdown, possibly not”. Camperdown was the initial favourite because an old hotel was available for sale.

Fortunately Camperdown provided no suitable water supply and within a year land had been found for the new Michaelhouse, at Balgowan,on a site of 70 acres donated by Mr Jaffray, on the railway and with ample water.

Those 70 acres make up much of the school campus as we know it today, the area inside the electric fence. In 1901 the migration group of 80 boys and accompanying staff arrived here, not by train as these had been commandeered for the war, but by ox wagon.

If you look across the fields and the bog stream to the hillside behind me, you will see the remnant of the farm Annadale, on which the Jaffray family lived. This is now owned by their descendants, the Butlers and Souchons, whose sons are also Old Boys.

From the district road you can see the old stone building, one of the original farm buildings. As numbers grew and the first dormitory was too small to accommodate all the boys, some had to sleep at the Jaffrays home.

If you stand at the cricket nets and look across the R103, you will see Iansfield, home of the Strachan family, also descendants of the Jaffray family.

What of our Founder:

Canon James Cameron Todd, a bright and enterprising young Anglican priest was sent to Pietermaritzburg in 1893 as chaplain to the Bishop of Natal and later he was promoted to Archdeacon of the diocese and vicar of St Peter’s in Pietermaritzburg.

Todd was born in Rangoon, Burma, educated back in England, at Christs College, Cambridge, where he graduated with an Master of Arts and Bachelor of Science.

Before arriving in Pietermaritzburg, he had already served the Church of England in Kimberley and at Vryburg.

Three years after his arrival in Pietermaritzburg Todd used his own funds to start Michaelhouse and for the next five years he ran the school without drawing a salary until the board resolved to allocate funds to pay this.

Todd had a clear vision for the education he wished to lead. He wrote our mission statement: Which still guides us today.

“Our aim at Michaelhouse is to make, not accountants, not clerks, not doctors, not clergymen, but Men, men of understanding, thought and culture.”

He also defined the school Motto “Quis ut Deus” Who like God, and the original school badge “a shield containing a figure of St Michael trampling underfoot the dragon and subscribed with the motto *Quis ut Deus?*”.

ANNEXURE A

How appropriate then that a magnificent statue of this very same scene now guards the front of school and welcomes all visitors to Michaelhouse.

His philosophy of education was interesting: He classed all subjects into three groups:

Disciplinary, those which a boy will make no use of after school: such as Latin and Greek

Instructive: those which will not increase his income but will enable him take a more intelligent interest in civic or practical life such as English and History

and practical: Those which a boy will use every day of his life such as arithmetic.

He also saw that subjects fall into different categories until a boy has chosen his profession: Latin being disciplinary for a farmer, but practical for a lawyer,

Geometry is disciplinary for a clergyman but practical for a surveyor and Chemistry is disciplinary for a lawyer but practical for a doctor.

Hence his curriculum based on Classics and Mathematics, which he believed form boys' minds.

All boys had to attend Divinity lessons except day boys whose parents objected and who received religious instruction in their families.

Todd had a clear understanding of the link between Old Boys and the school. He maintained that the Chronicle is important in maintaining this link and he was indeed prophetic when he wrote:

A boy's connection with his school is not severed when he leaves, but lasts throughout his life.... His whole tone, moral and spiritual, as well as intellectual, is largely determined for life by his school...Hence the old boys of a school necessarily form a brotherhood wherever they may be".

This brotherhood among generations of Old Boys has grown to be their defining characteristic.

After a difference of opinion with the board, largely about buying a piano and allowing the matron's son to attend Michaelhouse at a reduced fee,

Todd resigned in April 1903. Prize-giving was brought forward to 19 June of that year, so that he could present the prizes before departing for England.

At the ceremony he was presented with a silver tea service, bought by the 120-odd staff and old boys and inscribed in latin: *Conditori Nostro ac Primo Rectori*, "to our founder and first Rector"

An Old Boy wrote this about Todd:

"The magic of his personality inspired us with a sense of loyalty to himself and to Michaelhouse.... The power which he exercised over us must, I believe, have been something much more and beyond the ordinary influence of the Headmaster.

He possessed that personal magnetism and charm which accounts for many things, but in itself is unexplainable. Sympathy and kindness underlay his iron will. We feared him always, but we never ceased to regard him with affection....

ANNEXURE A

In all things we backed him up right or wrong. ... We knew him to be inexorably just; on the rare occasions when he was obliged to cane a boy, I have never known the punishment to be resented; on the contrary, the delinquent seems only to have remembered the sympathy which invariably followed these chastisements”.

Clearly Cameron Todd was much loved and respected and so it is no surprise that the school prayer opens with the line we all know so well:

“We give thee humble and hearty thanks for our Founder, James Cameron Todd...”

The Chronicle of October 1915 recorded the death of Todd after a short illness. So, wrote his old colleague Dobree: “He is to be buried today at Ruislip church, at 3 pm. I cannot go myself, but I have wired my cousin Mr Durand who lives near London, to go, if possible, and represent Michaelhouse. ... I shall however arrange that a wreath of Michaelmas daisies and other flowers be laid on the grave on Michaelmas Eve, with the school colours attached.... I may be able to do this myself”.

I hope that Todd is looking down with pride on his school which has upheld the vision and mission which he implemented 125 years ago and also on the Old Boys of his school, who live by the values he espoused.

While much has changed:

The Rector is still a lay Minister in Anglican Church

We offer a very diverse curriculum

Sport is compulsory and supervised

We continue to grow gentlemen, significant men

And so I leave you with a poem which prefaced the first Chronicle and to which we can all relate:

Dear Michaelhouse, thy walls resound
With cheeriest laughter's happy sound
Thy boys in all they do sincere
Their games and sports they hold so dear
If e'er for work they feel no zest
Still at their lessons do their best

O! when their course at school in run
May each to thee still be a son
O! grant thy children may uphold
Thy name untarnished, pure as gold
That when they into men have grown
To thee a debt they e'er shall own