



The first Junior Barbarian side 1960.

Back row: R. B. Keenan, I. J. Simpson, W. Meyer, K. McMillan, W. Williams, J. C. Stenhouse, M. D. Douglas.

Middle row: G. Kirton, J. Gilhooley, G. L. Johnston, A. G. Dryden, R. Gill, J. Mowlan, R. A. Urlich, R. Currie.

Seated: L. Smith, R. G. Sorenson (coach), J. W. K. Harris, A. J. McBeath (President), R. S. Stevens (capt), R. G. Bush (Club Capt), G. Douglas.

In front: D. H. Montgomery, B. Cole.

A FIRM BASE FOR THE BAA-BAAS

By Terry McLean

One supposes that because so many of the New Zealand Barbarians served in World War Two in the Navy, the Army or the Air Force that they appreciated — the more acutely-minded of them, at any rate — the necessity of a firm base for the club's future operations. By the late 1950s, when the new Eden Park, with its great, as I insist on calling it, "Stuart Hay Stand", in being, there were possibilities that the club would be granted part of the premises for a clubroom members could use on auspicious occasions. The Eden Park Trust Board seemed not unhappy at the idea.

Fortunately, one member of live-wire characteristics and aptitudes was not happy. Jack Bourke was astonished that the original Barbarians founded in the late 19th century had a constitution so loosely framed that, in effect, they came together, as a group, only once a year, for the Easter Tour of Wales. Located in a hotel at Penarth — Barbarians all over the world wept at the news of a few years ago that the place had had to give way to modern developments — they played Penarth on Good Friday, Newport on Easter Saturday, Swansea on Easter Monday and Cardiff the next day. In between, on Sundays, a golf match organised by Herbert Waddell, the famous Scottish flyhalf of the 1920s who became one of the great identities of the club, was played with extraordinary vigour at Barry. Then everyone went home.

It was a fact that the club played a couple of other fixtures — the Mobbs Memorial, as an example. But Bourke's inquiries suggested to him that the Big Baa-Baas were like the smile on the face of the Cheshire Cat — they appeared and disappeared; and that, annually, was that. That, for Jack, was most decidedly not good enough. He formed the idea that the Little Baa-Baas should have a place of their own, in proximity to Eden Park as headquarters of Auckland and — dare on say it? — New Zealand rugby.

When Bourke learned from Club Founder Hugh McLean that a famous Olympic oarsman, a gold medallist no less, named Dudley Storey, who, like "Big Mac," was in the carpet trade, might be willing to sell his place at 17 Cricket Avenue, sell, it too, at a reasonable price, he began organising as only Jack Bourke can organise.

Life-member Andy McBeath, a hard sell, was convinced in no time that the place would be an ideal firm base — Andy, at 18th Battalion and 4 Brigade level, over a long period of WW2, got to know plenty about firm bases.

Strangely, the club's committee reacted cautiously. Their best form of encouragement was to decide to refer it to the annual meeting. Bourke, grumbling, and Andy, who grumbled even better, roped in Peter Fogarty, known to be a smart man on money matters. Their idea of debentures to members and the proceeds of a Baa-Baas match on Eden Park was put to the annual meeting by McBeath with care and zeal. Many were the questions. Slack was the meeting's reaction. Battler Bourke got the impression many Baa-Baas thought he was riding far above Cloud Nine — riding for a fall, maybe.

Storey, who had been and gone and come back, was going again. He passed the wheeze to McLean: The place was "up" — to the best bidder. More or less coincidentally, the Auckland Rugby Union offered the club a room or rooms under the new Number Four Stand — now the North Stand. Club President Jim Bracewell and Bourke took a look at the place in the company of Link Warren, secretary of the union; and still Bourke wasn't convinced! The next annual meeting was coming up. Jack spent hours and days working up his case, a case that would overwhelm members with its simplicity and sincerity.

Then Bourke was struck by a bolt of lightning: Why not put the hard word on two distinguished Barbarians, Arthur Hughes, an All Black hooker against the 1950 British Lions, and George Nelson, who after winning the DSO during WW2 had played a leading part in the great tour of the New Zealand Army, the Kiwis of 1945-46? The two were in the wholesale wine and spirit trade. A meeting was held in the boardroom of Hughes & Cossar between Arthur and GB (they call him "Gunboat") on the one side and Bourke, Bracewell, McLean, Ron Bush (fellow-club founder with McLean), Barry Main and the member who acted as the club's honorary solicitor, Dave Grace. At Hughes' insistence, Bourke was made chairman. He told his tale.

Hughes and Nelson retired. They came back. They would, they said, act as guarantors. Grace



The 'House that Jack Built'. The clubhouse in Cricket Avenue shortly after it opened.

moved smartly in on the details of a loan agreement. The committee came to the party; and away went Bourke on turning essentially a small cottage into a clubroom, or, rather, clubhouse, which would be lasting and suitable.

Jack did wonders. If you were a Baa-Baa who could ride a motor-bike, you ended up by knocking walls together, or apart, for toilets. If you could drive a motor-car, you would be an ideal hand at setting up a laundry. Jack knew his key men like the back of his hand — electricians, cabinet-makers, carpenters. He whistled. They all came. Bit by bit, and not too long between bits, either, the place was — there is only one word for it — composed.

One masterpiece was a bar, Olde Englishe, foot-rail. Another was a fire-place, in working order. A third was a bookshelf, dedicated to rugby literature. A fourth was the devising of a half-pint pewter mug for each member inscribed, name by name; and if you happen, ordering a beer, to be handed, unbeknownst, your own mug, you have to shout the house.

International jerseys were donated and placed in cases most decoratively high on the walls. Jack or a lieutenant snipped the end off every different

rugby tie, club or whatever, worn into the premises and arrayed these tastily around the bar and part of the room. A smashing woollen carpet with the Barbarian lamb motif surmounted decorated the floor. "Men in Black" was placed in a special case, under its own light, so that members would always be aware that the name of the game was rugby and the name of the club was Barbarians.

They called it, naturally, "The House that Jack Built." It is a triumph. It is the firmest of bases for the club. Visitors from all over the world, rugby men naturally, have been astonished by the feel, the quality, the tone of the place. They have told Kiwi Barbarians that in their collective experience, which is very wide indeed, this Auckland club home is unique in world rugby. Now, Thursdays and Saturdays and sometimes on other special occasions, the place is open to members and their friends (who cannot possibly buy a drink, no matter how much money they may have), for a few hours of friendly comradeship. It is a magnificent possession. Nothing could be more suitable to the Golden Jubilee than a gathering at the clubrooms, if only to toast Bourke and his band, the blokes who bought and built the bastion of the Baa-Baas.