

Petone Football Club - Foundation Date report

Introduction

1. In undertaking research as part of our work towards an Honours Board and Timeline, Steve Minogue emailed Barry Smith as follows:

*"Hello again Barry,
I thought I would treat this separate from the NZ Reps enquiry.
(Incidentally, I do have a copy of the book you and Tony Hilton had published which did provide some information in this area).*

For many years now Petone have claimed the following

- 1. New Zealand's second oldest football club behind North Shore.
(There has always been talk of older clubs, but these are no longer in existence)*
- 2. Played the first inter club game of football in Wellington
Wanderers Petone v Rovers Wellington 1 June 1889*

Are these two statements recognised by New Zealand Football as being true?"

2. Barry Smith's reply gave us great cause for concern. It stated the following:

New Zealand Football does not keep historical records to be able to recognise any claim as to the longevity of clubs. Queries on the history of the game are referred to me as the Honorary Historian.

Whatever I say is taken as gospel. While this may be good for my ego, I would prefer others to pursue research and to be in a position to challenge my conclusions.

He subsequently stated:

Turning now to the Petone situation, the facts are as follows.

- 1. Association Football began in Wellington with the formation of the Rovers club in April 1889.*
- 2. A club called Petone Wanderers was formed soon after.*

3. On 23 June 23 1892 the Council of the WFA agreed to a proposal for the amalgamation of Petone Wanderers and WRC [Wellington Rowing Club] Football Clubs, the new club to be known as United.

4. United took part in Wellington Football Association competitions in 1893, 1894 and 1895 but withdrew its team towards the end of the 1895 season.

5. In 1898 the club now known as Petone SC was formed and granted affiliation with the WFA.

Since the new Petone club, was not linked to the old United club, its history dates can only date from 1898 in my opinion. I believe my view was also shared by the old WFA.

The oldest surviving Association football club in New Zealand is the Northern club from Otago founded in 1888.

The oldest surviving Wellington club is Wellington United with roots going back to 1893 when the Diamond club affiliated with WFA. The Swifts club, now part of the Waterside-Karori amalgamation, was formed the following year so Waterside-Karori has roots going back to 1894. .

The first club match played in Wellington under association football rules took place on 8 June 1889 at the Wellington College ground between Wellington Rovers and the Petone Wanderers. After playing two spells of 35 minutes each the game resulted in a win for the Wanderers by two goals to nil. The result was contrary to expectations as Rovers were decidedly the favourites.

I haven't been able to establish the exact date when the Petone Wanderers club was formed and I note that this is not given in your club's centenary book. The earliest reference I found to a Petone team was a piece in the Evening Post of 10 May 1889 stating that the recently formed Petone Wanderers club would be holding a practice at Gear's Paddock the following day.

The Rovers club (Wellington's oldest club) was formed at a meeting on 3 April 1889 so the exact formation date for the Wanderers would be some time after that but before 10 May 1889.

When writing the Petone history, John Bradbury acknowledged that United took no part in the championship in 1896 and 1897. However, he went on

to say "Petone returned to the competition and this marked the rebirth of the club we know today".

The question I pose is how could Petone return to the competition when there was no club in existence? My belief is that a new club was established - a club unconnected with the old United club.

Unfortunately there does not appear to be a record of events leading up to Petone entering the competitions in 1898. All I can find is a report of the WFA AGM for 1898 in which mention is made of a new club having been formed at Petone. Presumably John Bradbury had no more joy with his research. Thus any claim of a link between United and the club formed in 1898 can only be conjecture.

Let me know what you think.

3. So, whereas we had made the assumption that with the small size of Petone in those days, and no evidence to the contrary, the 1898 appearance of Petone among the WFA teams was a re-appearance, Barry had made the assumption that *the new Petone was not linked to the old United Club*. He believed his *view had also been shared by the old WFA*. Those of us writing our history were unaware of this view. As a result, with substantiation of views not evident on either side, I undertook to suspend the research I was undertaking on the Club's early office holders and focus entirely on whether 1889 was indeed our Club's foundation year.

WHY 1889?

4. In compiling our history for the centenary book, we gathered information primarily from the National Library microfiche copies of Wellington's early daily newspapers. This was extremely time-consuming because the newspapers blended coverage of football in with that of rugby football and Australian football, and other sports and activities, without separate paragraphs, let alone headings. Finding material took so much time that the book eventually suffered from lack of completeness and inadequate proof-reading, despite about 100 hours a week being put in over several months. There was never an opportunity to explore some of our information gaps nor to test questionable material.

5. Our foundation date had been confusing as long ago as the 1950's. The inaugural programme for the Hilton-Petone Tournament in 1955 stated our Club was founded in 1891, but there were no supporting stories or references. Then in 1956, H H A Renai was lured by the publicity given the Tournament to re-visit the Club of which he had been Secretary/Treasurer in 1898. Mr Renai had been a prominent

football figure on the field, as an official of the WFA, as well as our Secretary/Treasurer. I recall seeing him at the 1956 Tournament and he had been interviewed for the programme, which referred to Petone as the Club “he helped found”. The programme this time cited our foundation date as 1888, and referred to a number of inaugural office holders although since then it has been found to be well-documented that Mr Renai’s activity with the Club commenced in 1898, as did the contributions of the other names mentioned. We could put this down to his age (he was in his 80’s) or misinterpretation by whoever wrote the programme notes. But it was key that he claimed to be a co-founder.

6. Unfortunately Mr Renai died before the 1957 Tournament and the 1888 foundation date was repeated, as it was right through to the 1963 Tournament, after which Tony Hilton took over writing the programme and the references to our history were replaced by other material.

7. When we embarked on researching for our centenary publication, we used the information from a variety of sources to establish that the Club, known as the Petone Wanderers, was formed in 1889. All the information we could glean about its activities from those sources, especially the newspapers, are included in our book. This is largely about arrangements for and reporting on games, and practices. We were only able to find the names of two officials, such was the haphazard nature of the Club’s activity at the time.

8. The Club had difficulty with player numbers, including through an industrial dispute at the Woollen Mills, and was unreliable in getting the required numbers of players for games. With games and practices sometimes held in Wellington and transport being a problem, the Club’s dwindling resources saw it investigate amalgamating with the Petone Rugby Club in 1892, and then finally amalgamate with Wellington Rowing Club in that year to form the United Club. United fared badly and eventually withdrew from the championship in 1895. At the time of writing the centenary book we were not able to find any other reference to football involving Petone. We treated the gap until newspaper coverage of the games involving Petone in 1898 as a recess or such like and heralded the 1898 season as a rebirth. In the period 1895 to 1898 there was no reference anywhere in the newspapers to administration of football in Petone.

POST-CENTENARY INFORMATION

9. During the writing of the centenary book, Tony Hilton was to our surprise at the time generally not available to assist with the research and writing, although he did contribute the biographical material relating to his father and uncle. I later assumed he would have felt conflicted because he would by then have been in the

process of writing, with stats compiled by Barry Smith, the NZFA centenary book “An Association with Soccer”, published just two years later, in 1991.

10. Only in recent months have I paid particular attention to what Tony wrote in that book regarding the earliest years of New Zealand football. It was a surprise. “Dunedin’s Northern Club was formed in 1898 and a year later Petone arrived in the lower half of the North Island as Wellington’s second club, but now the oldest surviving club in the area. Wellington’s first recorded game took place in 1889 when the Petone Wanderers beat the Wellington Rovers 2 – 0.” So, another date of 1899 was introduced and our 1889 foundation date was not addressed by Tony.

11. It then became a case after receiving Barry Smith’s email, (if we were going to stick with our claim to being founded in 1889), of us really having to prove that there was a connection between the failing Petone Wanderers or United Clubs of 1892 and 1895 on the one hand, and the Petone Club of 1898 on the other. I have chosen to disregard Tony’s assertion re 1899 and suspect it derived from the fact that although the Petone Club took a well-documented place in Wellington football in 1898, it did not in fact have an Annual General Meeting until early 1899.

ADDRESSING THE GAP

12. My first recourse was to search every issue of the Petone Chronicle from 1895 to 1897 for any clue about football activity in the borough or possible continuity between United and Petone. A number of editions of the newspaper had been destroyed in a fire at the Chronicle offices many years ago but of those remaining, including those damaged by fire, I could find nothing on the microfiche referring to football involving a Petone-based team. I then searched the Evening Post files and similarly found nothing for this period. The United Club was based in Wellington, so one suspects that transport would have been an issue for the few remaining former Petone players, who would either have lived or worked in Petone.

13. In subsequent extensive research to ascertain any references to the Petone Wanderers in connection with the 1898 emergence of Petone AFC, I found nothing. Nevertheless, extending the research further into 1899 bore dividends in the form of a Notice of Annual General Meeting and a subsequent newspaper report of that meeting, held on 9 February 1899. Both refer to the meeting as the **First** annual meeting of the Petone AFC. This corroborated the 1956 claim of H H A Renai. One would have to have faith in the statements of the two newspaper items at the time, just two and a half years after the demise of United, that this was indeed the first meeting of a brand new Club.

14. The remaining step I took was to search the Evening Post winter issues of 1895 for the names of all players associated with the United Club. These could be obtained by checking not only team lists and match reports, but also lists of players advised in notices about training venues and times. I found 21 United Club players' names and the names of three executives and four committee members. I adopted the same course for the Petone teams of the 1898 season and found the names of 20 players and we already had several officials' names in our records. While I found the names of three United Club players on other Clubs' lists for the 1898 season, there was not one player or official from United named in Petone's ranks for 1898.

Conclusion

15. Obviously, the unconnectedness Barry Smith referred to is therefore substantiated by virtue of:

- the absence of any continuity whatsoever in terms of a strong sampling of player and administrative membership between United and Petone AFC;
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- the claim by H H A Renai to be a co-founder of the Club, albeit with a memory lapse or typographical error in citing the actual year; and
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- the discovery of a public notice and a newspaper report referring to the **First** Annual General Meeting of the Petone Association Football Club in February 1899, after one season's playing activity.
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16. The achievements of the Petone Wanderers should still be acknowledged by us, I believe, by way of some Club pre-history. In that way, the work that we have done for the centenary book and subsequently on the Petone Wanderers together with the then newly-formed Petone Borough's place in our football history are still very relevant and worthy of note.

17. It is as clear as it can be from the extensive and thorough research outlined above that our Club was in fact founded in 1898. I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss this ultimate conclusion at a Management Committee meeting and be involved in discussing the very important next steps based on the final recommendation.

Recommendations

18. I recommend that the Management Committee:

note that in our research relating to the creation of a Timeline Board, we sought affirmation from New Zealand Football's Honorary Historian concerning claims that we might be New Zealand's 2nd oldest Club;

note that Barry Smith's response was that since the new Petone club in 1898 was not linked to the old United club, Petone's history in his opinion can only date from 1898, not 1889 as we had thought; and

note that extensive new research carried out over the last few months supports the view that there was no link between the Petone Wanderers formed in 1889 and the Petone AFC formed in 1898; and

agree with the conclusions set out in paras 15 and 17 above.

John Bradbury
16 March 2011