

What's in a name?

People upon hearing an unusual or familiar name often ask a question about it. For example most if not all people in Christchurch have either heard about or more likely been to the Pioneer Stadium, but have you ever stopped for a moment and asked yourself where does that name come from?

Well to answer that question we have to ask a question. In fact it was not the club that asked but rather a newly installed stadium manager who asked a simple question, what are those bunch of guys doing in my stadium? Anyone would think they owned the place! Well in fact he was closer to the truth than he could possibly have known.



A peloton of cyclists of the Pioneer Amateur Sports Club, in front of the AMP building in Cathedral Square, about to head out for a Saturday afternoon run, circa 1886. ('peloton' from the French, originally meaning 'platoon' is the main group or pack of riders in a road bicycle race.)

Sorry here comes the history lesson, now turn off your phone, put down your iPad and pay attention as I am only going to say this once. It was all to do with money!, ha-ha that got your interest!, well I say money in fact it was the lack of it, you see back when the club started in the late 1890's the club had a large

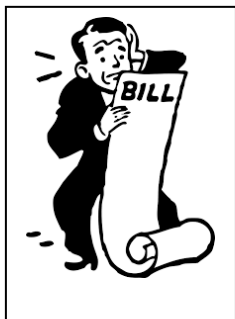
number of club members and so needed somewhere to meet, swap stories, have something to eat, play darts, billiards, etc. so after raising the necessary monies they purchased a building on the corner of Gloucester Street and Oxford Terrace in 1904 and stayed there happily for the next 73 years!

However times were changing, club members stopped riding their cycles and started riding motorcycles. The club itself also went through many changes during this 70 year period, the main changes being the splitting of the club away from the mountaineering side, and other smaller clubs which originally came under Pioneer's umbrella went their separate ways or just simply faded away due to lack of club members.



On the corner of Gloucester Street and Oxford Terrace, the site consisted of the Pioneer Amateur Sports Club and a building occupied by Haywrights. The Club wound up in 1976 and sold its building to the City Council. This photograph was taken on the day the contract was signed. Luney to build the Library was announced. The architects were Warren & Mahoney.

Right, back to the story....



Now the lack of club members was beginning to have an effect on the Pioneer Club itself and by the late 1970's the club's membership has fallen to a very low level, however there was still the costs of running the Club House. Something had to be done and at this point a very unlikely saviour appeared on the horizon, namely the Christchurch County Council! Yes I know it sounds difficult to believe, especially in the light of recent events. It was suggested by the C.C.C. that they

purchase the building and indeed two others on the same corner plot in order that they could use the land to build the new Christchurch Library, which tragically is no longer with us due to the 2010/2011 earthquakes.

At this point the remaining members of the club had a problem, take the monies and run! Or, and to their great credit, they decided to turn the club into a trust and place all the monies into that trust. There was still the problem of what to do with this large sum of money approaching \$260,000 or in today's money nearly \$2,000,000! Meetings were held, suggestions, arguments, wild schemes, Islands in the Bahamas, Houses in Monte Carlo, Ruling



small African Nations where all considered and to Christchurch's great good fortune it was finally decided to gift most of the monies to the building of a new stadium here in Christchurch. As a side note, but one of significance, it is interesting to note that the remainder of the monies (after paying off debts, taxes, fees, etc.) some \$7,500 was gifted to the new library to provide new books for the sports section. Much credit must go to this philanthropic act as this \$7,500 in today's monies is equivalent to over \$55,000! Not often do you hear of someone gifting such a large sum of money to a library.

Let us pause for a moment in our story and see what Dr. J.F. Mann had to say about handing over the Pioneer Club's generous gift at a dinner at the Town Hall on 14th November 1977

PIONEER SPORTS CLUB DINNER : CHRISTCHURCH TOWN HALL : 14 NOVEMBER 1977

This presentation sees the last official act in the winding up of the Pioneer Sports Club Ltd., and of the Pioneer Sports Club itself.

In some respects this is a sad occasion in that it sees the disbanding of what was probably the only club of its kind in New Zealand - a club that endeavoured to bring together and provide a facility for a wide range of sportsmen.

All of you will remember the Pioneer Sports Club for one reason or another. To many of you it will be of a Club that acted as host to a number of affiliated clubs whose own members had full membership rights of the Pioneer - at one time or another there were the Pioneer Motor Club, the C.A.A.C., the Canterbury Mountaineering Club, the Banks Peninsula Cruising Club and a number of others. Others of you will remember the Pioneer as the central club that provided a meeting place for annual meetings and weekly and monthly meetings of nearly all of the sports associations in the City including Rugby, Hockey, Football, Cricket, Suburban Cricket, Swimming, Softball and many other sports and cultural groups.

And some of you may have just been social members of the Club involved in billiards and snooker, the card room, or the other social facilities offered.

Over the years the Club had its ups and downs - I remember in Bill Cowles day when we were in a reasonably good financial state, offering sportsmen's welcomes to visiting sports teams from overseas. I'm sure the City Council was pleased for us to offer this community service - they were even less wealthy in those days than the present Council. In our poorer moments we just paid the light and gas bills.

As I said, in some respects the passing of the Club is to be deplored. On the other hand it is obvious that it gradually became outmoded. The density of traffic and parking problems made it difficult to get to, at busy times and with the growth in size of sports clubs and the better economic conditions following the depression and the second world war sports clubs and associations became wealthy enough to begin buying their own clubrooms. It seems, too, that sports clubs cannot exist without liquor and the lack of a liquor licence in the Pioneer proved to be a drawback. The club became less useful as a central meeting place and the decline which began in the late fifties led to the closing of the clubrooms in 1969. I must say in passing that if it hadn't been for the energy and diligence of our Secretary-Treasurer, Geo Towart, the Club would have closed a good deal earlier and we would certainly have been in a much worse financial position than we are in today.

I have resisted the temptation to give an historical survey or to mention a number of personalities who at one time or another helped to build and maintain the Club, but it must be said that the Club has been lucky in the past to have had men of the calibre of Charlie Thomas, Roy Parker, Charlie Franklin, Bill Cowles, to mention but a few. The mere mention of these names is sufficient tribute to the stalwarts of the past and to their foresight in forming the Club.

A word or two now about the present move. When it came to a decision about the disposal of the assets of the Club; the directors, and the Shareholders, as we used to call them, were determined that any project we adopted should meet a number of pre-determined criteria:

- . first: that we favoured a major project rather than the distribution of small sums of money to a number of groups;
- . second: that we should choose a project that would benefit as many sportsmen and women as possible;
- . third: that in some way or another we perpetuate the name of the Pioneer Sports Club.

Having all of these criteria in mind we obviously needed the support of a major influential organisation - it was clear that we could not go it alone. This led inevitably to an approach to the Christchurch City Council and we were delighted when the Council agreed to adopt our proposal and to meet a number of conditions along with our gift to the city. It has been agreed that a sum of money, \$7,500 be accepted for the sporting and recreation section of the Christchurch Public Library, that

this gift be suitably recognised by an appropriate plaque; that some acknowledgement be made in the building noting the fact that the new library had been erected on the site of the Pioneer Sports Club; that the remainder of the funds be used to assist in the building of a sports stadium at Centennial Park; that provision be made for meetings of the two remaining affiliated clubs; and that the stadium be named the Pioneer Sports Stadium.

It has been a matter of considerable satisfaction that we were able to satisfy the criteria set out and that the solution was reached by an agreement with the Christchurch City Council. This is very much in line with the philosophy of the Club itself which was founded in order to provide a meeting place for the sports-minded of the community and to promote sport in the city. It is appropriate that rather than being withdrawn from the community altogether the assets of the Club be channelled into another facet of community life that will benefit thousands of boys and girls and men and women engaged in sport and recreation.

I have with me a cheque and securities for very nearly a quarter of a million dollars which I have much pleasure on behalf of the Pioneer Sports Club Charitable Trust in handing over to you Mr. Hay as a gift to the City.

Dr. J.F. Mann

14 November 1977

Clearly a man who took his duties as club trustee very seriously and who understood most clearly the club's wishes for this money.

OK, now for the big finale.....

This brings the story up to date, or rather the 14th November 1977, a date which sees the then Mayor of Christchurch, a Mr. H.G. Hay graciously accepting the \$230,000 from the club at a formal dinner at the Town Hall. A year later the now apply named "Pioneer Stadium" came into being and has been used by the inhabitants of Christchurch ever since.

6 - THE PRESS, TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 1977.

Club hands over \$230,000 gift

The Pioneer Sports Club's gift of \$230,000 towards two large Christchurch City Council projects was handed over to the Mayor (Mr H. G. Hay) at a function in the Town Hall last evening.

The gift will be used for the Centennial Park project and to buy books for the new library to be built in Christchurch.

Mr Hay told club members that the gift was one of the largest made in Christchurch. "I hope it won't be the last, despite present levels of taxation and death duties," he said.

"Indeed, ever since your gift was announced the city was enriched the residue of an estate amounting to more than \$300,000, so perhaps you have started a flood of public gifts."

Mr Hay said the club had supported most amateur sports in Christchurch for many years as well as providing club rooms for social purposes and annual meetings.

Your occupancy of the Oxford Terrace site dated from 1904 until the council acquired it a year ago for the purposes of the new public library.

"May I say how much I have appreciated the friendly spirit in which the negotiations both to acquire the site and more recently for the disposal of your assets have been undertaken," Mr Hay said.

"The council has approved the naming of the sports stadium now under construction at Centennial Park as the Pioneer Sports Stadium, to perpetuate the name of your club, and a suitable plaque will be placed in the new building and also in the new public library building."

"We are also delighted that part of your assets will go towards the purchase of reference books in the sports section of the library and this should prove of great public interest to library users."

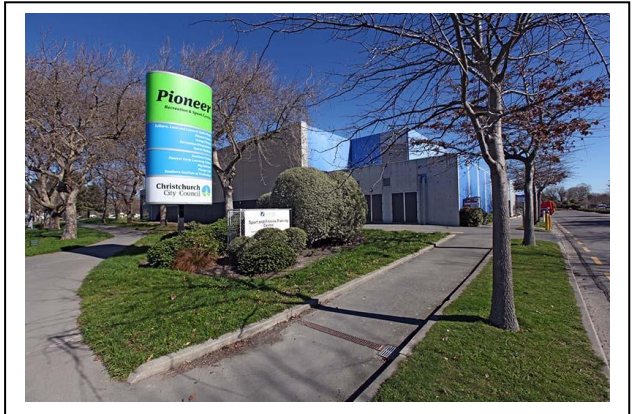
"We will also be pleased to make available meeting rooms to the Pioneer Motorcycling Club and the Canterbury Mountaineering Club on a rent-free basis in the new stadium."

Mr Hay said that all club members had participated in a most constructive way in two important civic projects for the recreational benefit of citizens—the new public library, which would begin construction within the next two years, and the Pioneer Sports Stadium, which would be in use next year.

The next day (15th) the Press Release reported that the then Mayor of Christchurch Hamish Hay had graciously accepted the \$230,000 from the club at the function, (note the rent free offer from the Mayor).

What's in a name? Well it seems that the Pioneer Club can be justly proud of their contribution to the health and wellbeing of the folks in Christchurch and the naming of one of Christchurch's premiere Sports stadiums ensures the continuation of the proud traditions and the Pioneer Club name. For those who are interested, a plaque commemorating this act of generosity can be seen on the rear wall of the upstairs meeting room, although it is often covered by the projector screen!

The author would like to thank Peter Dunn, Peter Hosking and other club members that have rallied around to help provide information that the Club can now present to the Pioneer Stadium management in order that the club's right to use the "club" meeting room, at no cost, for all



time can be confirmed. At the time of writing the author understands that the Club has applied, under the Freedom of Information Act, for additional documentation from C.C.C. to further support the Club's claim to the use of this meeting room.

Breaking news.....

Just off the press, and still slightly damp at the edges is the final and absolute confirmation that the C.C.C. did indeed do what the Pioneer Club trustees requested. The author is pleased to announce that the staff at Christchurch County Council have unearthed, after much searching, a page from the Council's minutes dated 7th November 1977 which states, well best that the document itself tells its own story.



7.11.77

General Manager's
Report

The Report of the General Manager and Town Clerk

PIONEER SPORTS CLUB CHARITABLE TRUST -
GIFT TO THE CITY:

The Pioneer Sports Club was established in 1879 and occupied the Oxford Terrace site - which had recently sold to the Council for the purposes of the central library project - from 1904 until 1969. No fewer than twenty-two major Christchurch sporting clubs and associations are affiliated to the Pioneer Amateur Sports Club which is now proposed to be wound up.

At a special general meeting of the Pioneer Sports Club Charitable Trust held early in October, it was unanimously resolved that the Trust's assets, amounting to approximately \$230,000 be gifted to the City of Christchurch.

This gift is made on the following bases:

- (a) \$7,500 is to be a gift to purchase reference books for the Sports Section of the new library; and an appropriate plaque will be placed in the entrance foyer recording the Club's occupancy of the site during a period of sixty-five years. Within the Sports Section, suitable acknowledgement will also be made.
- (b) The balance of the gift is to be applied towards the sports stadium currently under construction at Centennial Park on the understanding that the stadium be named "The Pioneer Sports Stadium" with an appropriate plaque also to be erected.
- (c) The monthly use of meeting rooms within the stadium on a rent free permanent basis is to be made available to two Club affiliates - the Canterbury Mountaineering Club and the Pioneer Motor Cycling Club.

His Worship the Mayor, acting under delegated authority in his capacity as Chairman of the Policy and Finance Committee, has accepted the gift on the conditions stated on behalf of the Council and extended its sincere thanks to the Club. Arrangements have been made for a function on 14 November at which the assets of the Trust will formally be handed over to the City.

It is recommended that His Worship's action be endorsed.

Christine Thompson

(Proud and honoured to be a member of the Pioneer Motorcycle Club)

Much thanks for the Images from Christchurch City Libraries and a Private Collector.