



THE ST. ANDREW SOCIETY OF SÃO PAULO

Matthew Clark Blair

Matthew Blair was born in Bridge of Weir, went to the local primary school then Camphill School, Paisley.

He used to display with some pride a large scar on his left hand, saying that he had almost lost three fingers as the mark of his apprenticeship as a butcher, after leaving school. He completed his National Service, mainly as a cook with the rank of Corporal, in the Army Catering Corps. He spent two weeks with the chefs at the world-famous Park Lane Hotel in London, in preparation for cooking demonstrations on the Army Stand at the 1948 Ideal Homes Exhibition, Olympia.

Leaving the army in 1940, Matt spent two years as a butcher, then joined the Coats organisation as a material mover at Ferguslie Mills, Paisley in 1951. In September of the same year, Matt enrolled at Paisley Technical College, for a City and Guilds Certificate for Textiles in 1956.

Coats philosophy to provide a studious, hardworking young man with an opportunity to make good was borne out, and Matt progressed from worker to foreman in 1953 and then to Trainee Departmental Manager in 1955. His responsibility increased in the Coats Organisation in England, 1956, Chile 1957-65 and India 1966-70 until Brazil in 1970 to manage Linhas Corrente spinning and twisting mill at Vila Ema.

While at Vila Ema, Matt distinguished himself not only as a fair and efficient administrator but also as someone who took an interest in his work force. This was seen in the attractive appearance of the mill grounds, by improved welfare facilities for the work force and his personal interest in his colleagues whatever their position.

Matt met and married Toinette when he was working in Chile and they had four daughters, Marie, twins Pamela and Deborah and Vivian.

Matt was a very keen Rotarian and the founder President of the chapter in Vila Alpina, where there is to this day the "Matthew Clark Blair Hall". His name was fondly remembered at a dinner in March 1997 commemorating 22 years of the Vila Alpina Rotary. He was also an avid sportsman, winning the Quaich golf competition in 1970, and an accomplished football player in his younger days. He organised several football matches in 1975 against SPAC, Copebrás, the Danish Colony and the Auld Enemy. He listened to the BBC sports results every Saturday night and travelled to World Cup games. Maybe it was on one of these trips that he parked a hired car in a limited parking meter and went to a late "pairty". He discovered the next morning, that the car, documents and keys had disappeared, and he couldn't recollect the registration number or any details. He had literally 'lost' a car in London!

As far as the Society is concerned, Matt was press ganged into substituting Ian Innes as Secretary the very day he arrived in São Paulo. This decision was originally taken to guarantee the necessary continuity through Vila Ema manager's secretary, who, did all the essential administrative work and knew all the background necessary. This was a good decision, borne out by the fact that Matt continued as secretary until 1973. In fact, Matt must have been unique as the one who first served on the Committee only as an office bearer - Hon Secretary 1970-1973, Vice President 1974, President 1975, Ex-officio 1976.



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During his year, the theme for St Paul's School competition was "The Tartan". With 118 entries the panel of judges had a difficult choice before declaring the winners, among them Corina Crawford, ex-President John Crawford's daughter, who won first prize in the 8-10-year category. At the prize-giving, Matt presented the school library with the complete works of Sir Walter Scott. Piping and dancing lessons continued at the school and some dancers appeared on television. The Society's country dance group performed at an international folk dancing display to mark the 75th anniversary of Clube Paulistano in May with the Governor of São Paulo present. On the intellectual side, the Society's team were 5th in the Brains of São Paulo Competition. On the lighter and brighter or maybe darker side, it was noted that 12 bottles of Drambuie were consumed at the Annual Banquet, 4 of which disappeared mysteriously.

Matt was an exemplary Committee member, hardworking, willing, efficient and although of firm views on what was right and necessary, he knew when to give ground, as his was also frequently the voice of reason when passions ran high. He was very interested in charity and during his year as President a decision was taken to give to Brazilian charities.

Sadly, Matt died in Scotland in July 1988, whilst on home leave. In short, as Toby Dods wrote:

"Matthew Blair is of what the Society is made and on which it will prosper".

