The Aula Club was founded in 1892, the inspiration of John F Fearon and Harold Tingey, who went up to Trinity Hall some five years earlier. For over a century, it has been a dining club for old Hall men - and now for more than 20 years women - of every generation. Its aim is to recapture and perpetuate the Hall spirit by bringing together a mix of high achievers from the College in whatever field or discipline, and particularly those who enjoy dining together. The membership of about 350 is made up exclusively of members of the College, including always a small number from the Governing body, which is an excellent way of ensuring that the Club keeps up to date with the College as it is today, its achievements, its problems, and its plans for the future. Over the generations many Masters, Senior Tutors and other distinguished Fellows have been regular diners as guests or as elected members. All its members are elected. About 15 new members a year are elected from the generation of undergraduates and post-graduates going down, but this doesn’t exclude election later for people who have been missed at the starting gate and whose friends want to propose them.

The Club owes its longevity largely to the efforts of John F Fearon and his son, John R Fearon, who, between them, organised its meetings for all but the last eight of the first hundred years. John F Fearon was elected an honorary Fellow in 1920.

Seven men attended the first dinner at the Holborn Restaurant in London on 8th April 1892, and the twelve who came to the second dinner on 18th June were elected founder members of the Club. Those invited were: W Harold Tingey, John F Fearon, Alan Hog, H S Millett, George Ridehalgh, R J A Morrison, W H Wailer, M B Johnson, C A Cancellor, S P Turnbull, R Trencer Michell, R A Wigram, T Willans Nussey. In 1897 the Master Ben Latham and Vice Master Edward Beck were elected Honorary Members thus cementing the Dining Club to the College. Meetings were subsequently held three times a year, at the end of each university term, with the summer meeting in Cambridge, occasionally in the Master’s Lodge at the Hall, where in 1898 the Master requested that the College be referred to in the Toast by the affectionate and customary title “The Old House”.

Soon after the Trinity Hall Association was founded in 1904, the Club gave up its summer meeting in Cambridge, and it has since met twice a year in London, usually at a club. The first meeting of the year is held at around the time of the University Boat Race in March or April, and the second one on the evening of the Varsity Rugby Match in December.

It has always been the custom for a senior member of the Club to take the chair at the Club’s meetings; on the only occasion on which this rule was broken, the chair was shared by twins. Although speeches are not encouraged except on special occasions, the chairman proposes the traditional toasts: the Royal Family, the Old House, the Governing Body, and members of the College who have represented the University against Oxford since the previous meeting.

The Club’s membership has risen steadily. From twenty men in 1900, it reached 250 in 1960 and has since grown to some 350. Today’s membership is drawn from every generation of undergraduates from 1936 to 2007; the first women members were elected in 1986. Membership is open to all members of the Hall who have participated fully in the life of the College, though members are no longer normally admitted while undergraduates. In addition to dining fees, there is a modest annual subscription.

The Club maintains its links with the College in several ways. It invites members of the Governing Body and undergraduates to dine as guests, and several Fellows are members of the Club in their own right. The Club also makes gifts to the College from time to time. The Club is represented on the Governing Body’s Alumni Liaison Committee.
The Club contributed to the Trinity Hall Endowment and War Memorial Fund in 1919, helped establish an Organ Scholarship in 1923, and lent the College funds to help buy the new Field in 1925. It gave a replica of the Founder’s Cup to Dr Bond on his retirement as Master in 1929 and commemorated the Hall’s sexcentenary in 1950 by donating the subscriptions accumulated during the Second World War to the College’s appeal and adding a James II porringer to the College’s collection. It made a substantial donation to the Milestones Campaign to commemorate the 650th anniversary of the foundation of the College - £5,000 to the Charles Crawley Fund, £10,000 to be used to establish the Aula Club Fund to assist undergraduates with the expenses of representing the University against Oxford in any sport, and £1,000 to the John and Danielle Lyons fund. The committee uses surpluses in the Club's accounts to increase the Aula Club Fund, and at the time of writing a further £30,000 has been added in this way. The Fund is administered by the Senior Tutor, to whom applications for grants should be made.

In November 2006 the Club launched an appeal to members to raise funds for the new bar – to be named The Aula Bar – within Phase II of the College’s Milestones project to rebuild and refurbish the central site. A total of some £210,000 was collected from the members of the Club and The Aula Bar was formally opened in March 2009 when the Club dined in Trinity Hall for the first time for more than a century.

Professor Dean, who attended the Club’s meetings regularly for over thirty years, was presented with an inkstand with the coronation date mark on his retirement as Master; the Club subsequently sent him a case of vintage port on his eightieth birthday and subscribed to a memorial fund on his death in 1961. The portraits of Professor Dean and Lord Maugham which now hang in the Hall were partly financed by the Club, which also commissioned the more recent portrait of Laurence Fleming. The Boat Club has been a particular beneficiary of the Aula Club’s patronage. A subscription of five guineas to the Latham Boathouse in 1903 was the first of many gifts over the years; others have included a weather vane, a set of oars, a light pair and, on the occasion of the THBC’s centenary in 1927, replicas of the flags which were lost during the First World War, with silver plaques on the poles commemorating each of the sixteen Head of the River crews. The Club gave the THBC a tub pair in 1950 on the occasion of the sexcentenary of the College. More recently, the Club made a contribution to the cost of printing the new history of the Boat Club which marked the centenary in 1987 of the THBC’s annus mirabilis at Henley, and in 1992 commemorated its own centenary with the gift of a new eight.

The Club’s 200th dinner took place in 2000 and, coinciding as it did with the College’s 650th anniversary, was an occasion for particular celebration. This was not the first occasion on which the Aula Club has held a commemorative dinner. A set of specially engraved silver tuns was produced for the twentieth anniversary dinner, and a gift of furniture for Dr Eden’s Room was made to mark the Club’s fortieth year. The Club commemorated its centenary in 1992 by a dinner at which it added to its collection of silver a model of a falcon, the Fearon family crest.

The Club has itself been the recipient of several gifts from individual members. In 1937, at a special dinner of the Club to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the THBC’s annus mirabilis, the surviving members of the 1887 crews presented the Club with a silver rosewater dish. Basil Henderson presented the Club with an 18th-century tankard when he was in the chair in 1951, a gavel was supplied by CA Potter in 1962, and Charles Crawley made a gift of the silver tun now used by the chairman when he was made an honorary member in 1984. John Fearon bequeathed to the Club a silver salver and a silver gilt replica of the standing cup and cover presented to Trinity Hall by Archbishop Matthew Parker in 1569.

The Aula Club is managed by an Honorary Secretary with the assistance of a small committee of members, which meets two or three times a year.

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