

Obituary — Tom Brock

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The sudden death in April this year of Tom Brock, a long-time ASSH member, was a huge shock to his many friends. One of nature's gentlemen he left a void that cannot be filled. With his passing the South Sydney rugby league club lost a tireless worker and loyal supporter, the game of rugby league lost its foremost club historian, and sports historian, especially those in Sydney, lost a friend and valued supporter.

Tom was one of the great clubmen at Souths. In the era of overpaid players and rampant commercialism he provided his time and effort for nothing more than the love of the club. During his association with the club Tom served as honorary historian, time-keeper, ground announcer, and statistician amongst others. He also wrote match reports on Souths for local newspapers, and assisted with organising school carnivals. In 1994 he won the 'Spirit of South Sydney' award for his contribution to the club. He was also made a life member of the club, a rare achievement for a honorary official within a professional club and a reflection of his contribution to Souths.

It was in his role as club historian that Tom made his greatest contribution. In a sport that has tended to neglect its past he stood out like a beacon. A lifelong fan of Souths, he was particularly interested in the history of the famous club. He built up an impressive collection of resources relating to the club and the sporting culture of the district, many of which are unique. No-one knew more about the history of the club, its players and the games it played. The club recognised this and appointed him as its honorary historian, the first time a club had made such an appointment. His knowledge of the club, and the game in general, ensured that his assistance was sought out by anyone writing about rugby league in Sydney.

I had the privilege of working with Tom over the past two years while researching a social history of Souths. Being an outsider and not having met him previously I was worried how he would react to someone moving into 'his territory'. I need not have worried, for I received, like many others have, nothing but encouragement and willing assistance. He willingly gave of his time, and gave me full access to his collection. An off-the-cuff query would often result in a phone call from Tom a couple of days later with an abundance of information on the issue I'd mentioned.

It was a mark of the respect in which he was held by players and supporters alike that he was able to secure for me a large number of potentially unwilling interviewees. As anyone who has written a club history knows, assistance such as this is invaluable, and I owe him a debt of gratitude that cannot be expressed in words. For Tom, he was just happy to help someone out, and to help with anything that he thought could assist the club he loved.

Although South Sydney were his great passion in life he was a fan of most sports and just as interested in their past. A regular attendee at the Sydney ASSH seminars he was a valuable asset to all those who took part, and few presenters would not have gained some insight from his wide knowledge of sport. To call Tom an 'amateur historian' is to do him a great injustice, for his was displayed in a number of quality works. He collaborated with Ian Heads on *South Sydney: Pride of the League* and contributed the Australian section of Trevor Delaney's recent *International Grounds of Rugby League*.

Tom attended a number of Sporting Traditions conferences, the last being in Brisbane. He had hoped to travel to Perth for this year's conference providing, of course, that it wouldn't clash with him watching his beloved Souths.

Charles Little

I wish to endorse all the comments made by Charles. Tom was the archetypal 'decent bloke' and I will miss seeing him at Test matches at the SCG and at the ASSH Sydney seminars. Tom was always there.

After retiring as a Personnel Officer in his late 50s he was a sprightly mid-to-late 60s who enjoyed all the functions of ASSH. Tom asked few formal questions during a seminar or a Conference presentation but frequently made invaluable suggestions afterwards based on his wide reading and his excellent memory.

I will remember Tom as a great 'behind-the-scenes' man and a helper. His knowledge and contacts were enormously helpful to Charles in his thesis research. Tom also organised the ASSH meetings which were held at the Souths at Redfern. We even had the privilege of holding ASSH meetings in the South's Board Room.

I think it reflects well on ASSH that Tom found a comfortable 'home' in our Society. We were fortunate to have the input of a dedicated and informed administrator and archivist.

Richard Cashman