

A potted history of the social club from the memory of the late Pat Collins in February 1997

The sports & social club was formed by a group of employees during the 1950s. It originated from officers working in the town hall, which at that time were many in number who played football, cricket, table tennis, etc in various leagues in the borough.

They met in a small building adjacent to the Chestnuts playing field, this building comprised of changing rooms with toilet and shower facilities and a small lobby area in which was a snooker table and two folding table tennis tables.

At that time the staff canteen was in the town hall basement. The then Town Clerk (Mr G Blakely) wanted to move the canteen out of the building to another site and the building used by the sports & social club was targeted as the most suitable.

In 1965, following the amalgamation of the boroughs, the housing department vacated the wooden building in the town hall grounds. Mr Gomm of the Town Clerks department and Mr George the Borough Treasurer offered this venue to the sports & social club, because if acceptable, would enable development of the old changing room site.

The offer was accepted by the management committee of the sports & social club and in 1965 the snooker table was re-sited in the new clubhouse along with several items of sporting equipment.

The building vacated by the club then became the canteen.

In 1967 Truman's brewery offered the club a loan to build a small bar, up until then all drinks were purchased from an outside source and bought into the club for supply. The offer was accepted and the first clubhouse bar was built.

The building at that time consisted of a maze of small corridors and small single offices which were used as storerooms, as was the loft space.

The public area of the building was large enough to form the basis of the members hall that you see now, although many changes have taken place since that first bar was installed.

The sports & social club was granted a Club Registration Certificate by the Beacontree Division Magistrate Court on 31st December 1968 as it was a non profit-making organisation, with any surplus income being used to provide better and more comprehensive facilities for the members.

The Town Clerk was concerned about the lack of adequate rest room within the town hall and it was agreed that membership of the sports & social club would be open to all employees for a membership fee of 6d (2.5p) per week.

There were few changes until 1969, then after a change to the way the club was managed, membership began to increase.

The then Town Clerk (Miss Edna Cann) was approached for permission to demolish some of the internal walls in the building enabling more floor space to be achieved.

Her reply was that the internal structure of the building was ours to do with as we felt necessary, and although she would not be prepared to pay for any works to the interior of the building, she agreed to the Council maintaining the exterior of the building and that no charge would be made for use of the building whilst it remained solely for the recreational use of Council employees, a facility

that the Council could not afford to pay for from its own funds.

It was about 1976 that the Club Chairman at the time, Colin Warmington, approached myself as Bar Manager and suggested that the Club attempt to introduce 'Real Ale', he was of the opinion that it would be a good seller, I was not so sure.

An approach was made to Youngs brewery at Wandsworth and after a visit from one of their representatives it was agreed that they would deliver a 'Pin' of Special Bitter each week to see how it sold. (for those unfamiliar with beer measures a Pin is equal to 16 pints, a Firkin 72 pints and a Kildikin (kil) 144 pints.

The first Pin lasted 2 hours !!

The following week the brewery delivered a Firkin, this lasted a day !

By now it was plainly obvious that this Real Ale stuff was going to be a good seller and an account was opened with Youngs brewery.

Within a few weeks we were selling two Kils per week and the Club was well on it's way to being the Real Ale outlet it is now.

During the early 1980s a group of members met one Sunday morning in the clubhouse and with the aid of hammers, jemmys and various other tools numerous internal walls were removed. I am sure that it will be of interest to know that all the internal walls of the clubhouse were made of asbestos sheets and none of wore masks but we are still alive twenty odd years later.

The valiant group of demolishers include Andy Johnson, Mick Murray, Jim Mitchell, Alan Jones, Ron Berg, Don Carter and yours truly. I cannot recall the names of all the other helpers but there was no shortage of volunteers as free beer was on tap for all those assisting.

One of the jobs that took place at this time was the resiting of the snooker table. Originally it has stood further into the main hall and was erected with the baulk cushion facing the assembly hall. Moving it to it's present position meant building brick pillars under the floor to take the weight, the table weighs approximately one and a half tons !

A professional company (Rileys I think) dismantled the table and rebuilt it where it now stands, once again the same band of volunteers helped with the moving of the frame and slate bed.

Table tennis was a very popular game in the hall at this time, we had two tables and it was quite usual for a table tennis ball to land in your pint sometime during the day.

A regular criticism the Management committee received was that there were no facilities for preparing foodstuffs for weekend hirings, in other words, no kitchen.

It was decided that perhaps it was time to remedy this ailing and, once again, it was the breweries were approached with a view to assisting with the cost of these works.

A small annexe was built on the side of the clubhouse, this not only provided a small kitchen but also increased the beer store by 150% which meant that we could now begin to provide a range of ales and lagers previously beyond our capacity.

The brewery that came up with the best offer on this occasion was Tolly Cobbold of Ipswich and

after the formalities we began to stock the full Tolly range including Original and Best bitters.

Another small 'loan' was taken out from Scottish & Newcastle breweries, however this 'loan' was not repayable but written off over a period of years. (This practice has since been declared illegal).

This enabled the club to provide Wm Youngers Bitter and McEwans lager which at the time were very popular.

Similarly, an approach was made to the club by Carlsberg, who offered to supply their lager at a discounted rate. This offer was accepted and Carlsberg Hof was installed.

The range of beers now available were:

Youngs Best Bitter

Youngs 'ordinary' Bitter

Tolly Original Bitter

Tolly Best Bitter

Wm Youngers Tartan Bitter

Carlsberg lager

McEwans Lager

Guinness Stout

Murphys Stout

Strongbow Cider

Woodpecker Cider

Plus a considerable range of bottled beers from each supplier.

It should be borne in mind when considering the number and variety of beers we sold that all of these were dispensed from a small bar area (8 feet by 2 feet six inches) and at times the serving situation became very difficult indeed.

The only food the club sold prior to the kitchen development were 'ploughmans' lunches.

The provision of these involved a daily delivery of French bread from Scotts bakery in Orford Road, yours truly purchasing blocks of cheese, jars of pickles, paper plates, plastic knives etc from a cash & carry. Cashmart in Rigg Approach off Lea Bridge Road being the first of these used. Following the closure of Cashmart we used Nurdin & Peacock at waltham Abbey.

The club employed a retired Town Hall tea-lady Emmy Humm to prepare plates of cheese, bread, pickles and ham, the ham being purchased by Emmy from a butchers shop in Wood Street each morning.

Ploughmans lunches were then dispensed by the bar staff and proved to be very popular indeed.

The bar was staffed at lunchtimes by volunteers initially, with me being the usual volunteer ! However, it soon became apparent that we required a full time bar person and Jean Blackborrow was appointed to work between 12 noon and 2:30 pm (the bar then closed at 2pm). Jean worked alone for the first hour, with my dearly beloved working with Jean from 1pm on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, Linda Carter covering Tuesdays and Thursdays.

This arrangement continued up to the time of the appointment of the clubs first steward Steve Whiting.

The system of hall hire on Saturdays has changed little since the early days with this difference:

During the early 1970s the situation could sometimes be difficult during the afternoon of a Saturday hiring as the clubs cricket team played in a Saturday league on the Chestnuts field behind the clubhouse and took their lunch and tea interval in the club.

This meant ensuring that all was cleared away before the bride and groom at the clubhouse ! I recall on many occasions having to wander across the field to find who had the keys to the clubhouse. It was usually Bob Bennett, who at that time was our Sports Secretary and captain of the clubs cricket team.

As the popularity of the Saturday hirings grew, and after too many problems of this nature with the cricket team, they moved to Ridgeway Park in Chingford giving us more scope for hall hire.

The clubs football team also played on the \chestnuts field in the Corinthian Sunday league with the bar being opened Sunday lunchtimes for the teams.

Our first steward Steve Whiting (known as 'jovial Steve') didn't last long, and was soon replaced with our second steward, a man called Geoff I believe. He lasted only a few months before resigning (to run a pub in Chelsea I think).

On the clubs management committee at this time was an associate member called Danny Crossley, who had been made redundant from the Polygram record company that was situated in Salisbury Hall Walthamstow (now Sainsburys).

He was a very well liked member of the committee, very precise and organised and he asked if the committee would consider him as our next steward. He was interviewed, along with various applicants who had responded to the clubs advert, and was offered the job.

One of Danny's bar staff was a family friend, Glynis South, and although she had no experience of bar work, Danny was sure she would be an asset to the club.

Danny resigned after a while, through personal problems, leaving the club without a steward once again. As a 'temporary' arrangement, Glynis was appointed steward of the club.

Well that's it as far as I'm concerned, I hope some of the foregoing is of interest to you.

Pat Collins
February 1997

Goodbye and thanks for all the fish