

The New Club Wheatley - A brief history (Est. 1937)

During the 1930s Capt P.E.D. Addis sent out a circular to the whole village to see if there was any interest in forming a Men's Club for the purpose of meeting for pub sports and of course drinking.

It was not against the law to exclude women in those days and over thirty men replied positively to the proposal. A meeting was called in The Merry Bells where it was proposed to house a snooker table, bar billiards and darts as well as bar facilities. It was generally agreed that Capt' Addis would go ahead with arrangements on that basis. The only drawback being lack of funds so Capt Addis imposed a joining fee of 10 shillings and sixpence (1/2 a guinea) and 8 shillings subscription equivalent to about two weeks wages. Twenty three men duly paid and became the original founder members as listed and displayed in the Lounge alongside a picture of Capt P.E.D.Addis.

Among the members that night [1st Dec' 1937] were some elder gentlemen who contributed more than requested [i.e. M.Fane, Bill Berry, D.Sillar, M.Hancock, and M.Chambers and subsequently struck a deal with The Merry Bells committee with Halls and Morrells both agreeing to supply the beer, also providing much needed funds towards the venture. Initially members took turns to run the bar on a voluntary basis until Sid White agreed to work as Bar Person for a nominal fee.

After the initial alterations and building works were complete (1 year,) members carried out redecorations and maintenance works until the membership swelled with the return of our armed forces at the end of the war when membership almost trebled. During the 1950s the Club had outgrown the Upstairs rooms at The Merry Bells and the search was on for new premises. Joe Moss the Landlord of The Red Lion as it was known passed away leaving the property vacant. M. Cox and Vic White negotiated with Halls Brewery and a Tenancy agreement was struck leaving the Club members to make all the alterations necessary. This included an extension for the snooker room which is now our Lounge and following subsequent alterations within a year the membership had reached 200.

Further alterations took place to make the upstairs flat habitable and a permanent Steward was appointed to look after the Premises and run the bar etc. Win Merriman, Bill Smith, Cyril & Ede Curtis were a few of our earliest stewards. During the 1960s it became apparent that the Club had outgrown the facilities and proposals were made at an AGM for further extensions to the building. A first floor room was added above the Snooker room and the table was moved upstairs to its current home whilst the old snooker room was converted to a lounge with full length bar. The party walls in the bar were removed to make the existing L shaped bar with new darts ocky. The stairs up to the flat were also removed at this time with new access to flat made via Snooker room. An insulated cellar was built to replace the old beer shed and the raised garden to the rear was excavated to give a lower storage area for empties. The membership continued to increase and the Club had a long period of stability with a healthy bank balance.

As elder Committee men retired so new members were elected and brought along new ideas for the future of The New Club. One idea was to obtain the freehold of the property and sever ties with the brewery and another for further extensions by way of a dance hall complete with new toilets, kitchen and internal chilled cellar. In spite of lengthy negotiations with Halls Brewery they would not relinquish the freehold to the property as they did not want to lose one of their best customers.

However, during the following months Cullum's yard (i.e. Hathaways) became vacant and following negotiations with the owners the yard was purchased for £6000-00p and full planning approval obtained for a New Club building on the site. Halls Brewery came to hear of this and when advised of our plans to move to new premises suddenly decided to sell us the freehold of the existing premises. A short while later an Extraordinary General Meeting was called at which the members voted to go ahead with building plans and obtain quotations for proposed extensions. Stoneshire Construction was appointed to carry out site works and Lancashire bar fitters to do the internal fit out. Access to the rear was not possible at this time so a deal was done with our then neighbour, Col. Ashton to allow them access to their cottage and acquire our garage, in exchange for land to the side of the club so giving us access to create a rear car park.

Once final details were all agreed a final estimate of £38,000.00p was received and with the members approval contracts were signed and work could commence on site. The whole project took 9 months to complete and

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comprised of excavation and earthworks for erection of new Hall and construction of raised car park to rear. Creation of a larger internal, insulated and chilled cellar, new toilets and kitchen fittings. The main bar and lounge area was completely stripped out and rebuilt in its present form with suspended ceilings and all new fittings and furnishings.

The project was partially financed by the sale of Hathaway's yard for £18,000.00p at three times its purchase price (now private dwellings), £8000.00p from Club Savings and a brewery loan of £12,000.00p, repayment of which was linked to barrelage sales. After a Grand Opening put on by our then Steward Mick Pepperal and his wife Marion the Club continued to prosper and the takings soon reduced our loans and within several years we were debt free and self-sufficient.

The 60s, 70s and 80s came and went during which time live entertainment was a weekly occurrence and the Club boasted performances by groups from "Opportunity Knocks" a talent show that was the fore runner/prequel to the X factor and the Voice. During this time numerous Stewards also came and went some better than others and one particular one causing the Club financial hardship to the point of asking members to help out financially. Our costs were higher than our income which could not be maintained for any length of time and in order to increase profits, and following our accountants advice, we sought a new supplier with better rates and more competitive pricing and happily The Club pulled through and remains to this day living proof of what can be achieved with hard work, determination and dedication of those concerned.

As the Millennium approached and with new faces on the committee a new challenge presented itself with the dilapidated exterior needing some loving care and attention. Volunteers were sought from existing Club members and the majority of all building trades came forward and gave willingly of their time to refurbish the whole exterior of The Club. A pitched roof replaced the old flat roof over the front door and new uPVC Windows, gutters and fascias installed. The external walls were rendered, new signs erected and a raised timber decking constructed with balustrades provided and new disabled access completing phase 1. Phase 2 comprised the rebuilding of the stone wall to the east side, painting of steel fire escape staircase, and external decking with 6ft Privacy fence built outside stewards flat. Work to the rear of the Club (phase 3) comprised a new protective canopy to rear doors, the old store roof was removed, the walls extended with new roof provided to create a new larger kitchen area as exists today. Internally, the kitchen in the flat was completely stripped out and renewed (phase 4)

In 2005 work on the Aunt Sally courtyard began (phase 5) and with the assistance of Nelms and Son, paving stones were laid and fencing erected with secure rear gate installed. The toilet facilities, with the help of Pete Keely, were once again renewed and modernised completely, including the addition of a disabled toilet. The construction work was finalised with the complete fit out and installation of the Kitchen facilities enabling catering to be carried out for the main hall, together with Altro flooring to the rear corridors and toilets with redecoration to finish.

During all this work our Stewardess and her partner moved on to other establishments and our current stewardess was appointed after a brief period with no Steward. Jo had previously been a regular bar person who had acted as relief Stewardess when required. Jo, with the Committees full support, has since organised every aspect of the Clubs operation and makes The New Club what it is today. In 2008 we began to benefit from all the renovations by way of increased hall hire, Sunday lunches and Jo's organisation and attention to detail.

During 2011/12 our Secretary Bernard Newman and long standing Chairman John Coles decided to stand down after many years of dedicated service. James Gilding took the Helm as Chairman with John Coles remaining by his side as Treasurer. James being a plumber/heating engineer installed a new heating system with independent boiler to the main hall having already removed the raised stage, re-sited the indoor Aunt Sally pitch and installed new Dart Boards and lighting for major competitions. With the help of willing volunteers the bar surface was completely sanded down and re-varnished and the Club was redecorated throughout, including new carpet and completely stripping and resealing the dance floor.

In 2013 the year in which we are celebrating 75 years of existence we have a very stable membership of over 500 people and in spite of the current economic climate our trading is good and with the relentless work that Jo puts in behind the scenes the future prospects are looking very good.