

10 WILKES ROAD.

Sandown Workingmen's Conservative and Unionist Club.

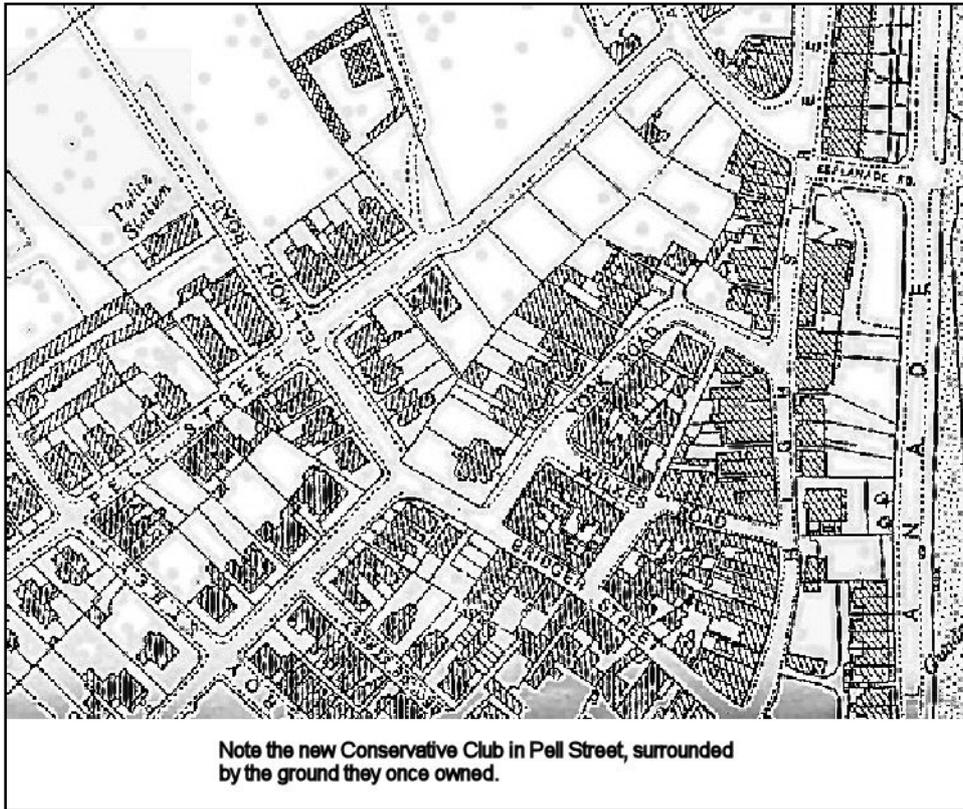
By Dave Bambrough. 2009.

The first Conservative Club in Sandown was opened in late 1878 in the old Town Hall on the corner of St. Johns Road (then Bridger Street, from the High Street as far as Leed Street) and Union Road. It is now a residential dwelling on the first floor with Learn Direct occupying the ground floor. Within three years the membership had well outgrown the amount of space required for members comfort, so the committee decided to build a club to their own specifications. Plans were submitted to the Local

Board (Council of the time) on March 16th 1882 and approved.

The new Club opened on September 22nd 1882 on the corner of Leed Street and St. John's Road (then Pellmont Road, from Leed Street to Carter Street).

Ten years later membership had once again out grown the size of the Club and plans were put forward for the erection of a third Conservative Club. The chosen sight was in Station Avenue (then Pell Street). It was completed by December 1894 and officially opened with a grand



dinner in January 1895. This time it was big enough and has (with extensions) survived to the present day. This one had the title "Sandown Conservative and Unionist Club. (Unionists were certain Liberal supporters who opposed home rule for Ireland and amalgamated with the Conservative party).

There were two political clubs open at this time in Sandown, the Liberal Club in York Road (where the present Social Club stands) and the Conservative Club. Conservatives that partook of refreshment in the Liberal Club were frowned upon by their own kind and the matter was often referred to at annual general meetings. The Liberal Club closed in March 1930 and re-opened as the present day Social Club the following month.

Many working class men frequented the Conservative Club from its inception and were accepted for a period of time, but gradually over the years the Landed Gentry from Upper Sandown began to take offence at many of them drinking at the Club in their working clothes. So the working class men, probably feeling a little ill at ease amongst their more learned companions, decided to break away and form their own club.

Why the intelligentsia of the main club would encourage a loss within their ranks is bit of a conundrum, as it would surely reduce the revenue of both membership fees and bar takings. But breakaway they did, dividing the towns' Conservative Club's membership between two clubs.

The Sandown Workingmen's Club opened its doors at number 10 Wilkes Road in March 1908 and within five weeks had attracted 231 members. The club initially had the grand idea that one day they would have enough capital for which to purchase their building outright, but this was never to be. The Club sustained a meagre existence for a number of years, just holding their head above water until January 1923 when they were refused a Registration Certificate by the local Magistrates for permitting drunkenness.

The Club was closed for six months with the Committee recommending that it should be dissolved as from June 30th and a new Committee formed with all effects handed over to them, providing they

were able to form a new club on a satisfactory basis. The general idea was that the new Committee would comprise representation from the local branch of the Isle of Wight Conservative Association but agreement could not be reached and the Club closed. It re-opened in November 1923 and continued in much the same vein, usually managing to pay their financial commitments but never accruing any substantial amount of capital for which to purchase the club.



No. 10 Wilkes Road, the Sandown Workingmen's Conservative Club closed due to illicit drinking in 1938.

Then, without warning, for the second time in their comparatively short existence the Club found itself involved in another major incident. The police had been watching the place for a number of weeks and decided to raid the Club. The rather crass licensing laws allowed the Club to remain open for games until 11pm, (snooker, billiards, cards games, etc) but no drinks were to be sold after 10pm, with ten minutes being the accepted time allowed to finish the pre 10pm purchased drink.

Three police officers attached to the Sandown Station entered the premises under a warrant at 10.30pm on Saturday, January 8th 1938. All present at the time were interviewed, evidence collated and their names and addresses were taken, as the police knew that there would more than likely be a summons to answer.

Two of the club's main officers were unavailable at the time. The Club's Hon. Secretary, Mr. J. Taylor was away on business on the mainland and the Hon. Treasurer, Mr. R. A. Clarke had died a few days before.

The case came before magistrates at the Isle of Wight County bench at Ryde on Tuesday, January 25th 1938. The sixteen people facing charges were; Thomas George Cooper (steward of the club), Stanley Daniels (postman), David Duncan (licensed victualler), Percy Warren (labourer), Ernest Duff (mechanic), George Boyton (commission agent), Henry Meguyer (motor driver), Frederick Chambers (labourer), Walter Warren (labourer), Harry Shandley (clerk), Albert Ferguson (civil servant), Thomas James Hyde (motor driver), Hugh Myhlenphort (motor driver), Herbert Reginald James (farmer), George Pauncefort (dairyman), all of Sandown and Hilton Brown (fitter) of Cowes. Another defendant, Frank White, (decorator) was acquitted, although present at the time it was proven that he was a teetotaler.

The description of the premises given in court was as follows: a lock up building of four rooms, a bar, card room (downstairs), billiards room and a store room upstairs. The court was told that the books were so badly kept that it was difficult to tell whether some defendants were members at all.

The prosecution stated that the police had taken a position at the rear window of the Club at 9.50pm on Saturday January 8th. Although unable to look directly into the bar, by conversation and noise it was evident that drinks continued to be served after 10pm, the time the bar should have closed. On questioned what remarks he heard, the witness said: "Two small nuts", "Who's in the chair please", "All the best George", "a small bottle please", and shortly afterwards the easily recognisable voice of Mr. Duncan who said "a small bottle and whisky".

Three and a half hours later the sixteen defendants were all found guilty of consuming intoxicating liquor during non-permitted hours. They were all fined £1 each and allowed one month in which to pay. The hapless steward on leaving the witness box had collapsed in a faint and had to be carried out of court. He bore the brunt of the sentence being fined £5 (a small fortune in those days for working class people).

The bench decided that the club should be struck off the register and they disqualified the premises from being used as a club for six months. That was the end of the Sandown Workingmen's Conservative and Unionist Club, as it never reopened its doors as a licensed club again.

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