

THE HISTORY OF SANDOWN CONSERVATIVE CLUB

1878-1961

Before the emergence of the Labour Party in 1900, which was then only a parliamentary pressure group, only two parties of any importance existed, namely the Conservative party and the Liberal party. Sandown had many Conservatives, notably in the upper area of town (Beachfield Road, The Broadway, Nunwell Street etc;) and in 1868 there was talk of them creating a club in which to socialize. The idea lay dormant for ten years until somebody recognised the Old Hall on the corner of Union Road and St. John's Road



The first Sandown Conservative Club in Bridger Street 1878. Note the Commercial Hotel public house to the right of the picture.

(then Bridger Street) as a possible venue. The new Town Hall had opened in Grafton Street 1869 releasing the Old Hall of many of its main functions. For ten years it had hosted a variety of different interests but was now without any consistent purposeful use, so here was the obvious building for which to serve as a Conservative Club. The establishment had been previously used for entertainment and Local Board Meetings, the forerunner

of The Sandown Urban District Council.

The first Conservative Club in Sandown duly opened at the Old Hall in late 1878. The yearly subscription was 4s. 4d per annum or 1s. 1d per quarter, the Chairman considered this was low enough to suit the pockets of all classes. (Sandown appears to have been the first Conservative Club on the Island but within a short space of time many other towns and villages followed suit).

Conditions were cramped within the Old Hall requiring many hours of DIY, converting two rooms into one, to create comfortable sized areas. There were no bar facilities as the club did not have a license to serve alcohol, so soft drinks and beverages were the order of the day.

The inaugural club dinner was held on the 18th September 1879 when between 20 and 30 members were dined and entertained throughout the evening. Mr. W.H. Wooldridge, a local solicitor, conducted the evening replacing the absent Colonel Brandt the official chairman.

An advert in the Isle of Wight Chronicle that year stated: "We beg to inform visitors that a Conservative Club is now open in Bridger Street and visitors can avail themselves of the advantages of the club by being introduced to it by a member". (Bridger Street ran from the High Street to the corner of Leed Street, prior to being renamed St. Johns Road commemorating the building of St. John's Church).

The first President of the club was the very influential Sir Richard Everard Webster, G.C.M.G., Q.C, M.P. He was the Conservative Member of Parliament for the Island from 1885-1900, a Queens Counsel member, he virtually owned the company that built Sandown Pier and was a director of the Isle of Wight Newport Junction Railway, 1879-1887 (Sandown to Newport line) and principal proprietor of Sandown Waterworks. He became Lord Chief Justice of England in 1900 and then acquired the title Lord Alverstone.

With a membership of 129, the first annual balance sheet after paying all the expenses showed a clear profit of £15 12s 1d. (Approx. £1,500 in 2012). The officers and committee at this early time were mainly businessmen of Sandown and retired gentry.

Three years on, (1881) the Old Hall had served its purpose, the increasing membership had out grown the available space for comfortable gatherings and a bigger club was required.

Plans for the erection of a new Conservative Club were put to the Sandown Local Board Committee on March 16th 1882 and approved. The club was to be purposely built and paid for by a club member Mr. Dampier-Child, the current Treasurer. The site for erection was at the junction of Leed Street and Pellmont Road, which ran from Leed Street to Carter Street, later to be renamed St. Johns Road throughout, incorporating Bridger Street.

The design allocated two floors. The ground floor housed a reading room, smoking room and a committee room. The first floor had a canteen, offices and a billiard room with a brand new table, built by Wright and Co., donated by Mr. Charles Tottenham a prospective Conservative candidate for Newport. The opening of the new Club in Pellmont Road was inaugurated by a dinner on Friday 22nd September 1882, the catering provided by Mr. Harvey Child. (Then proprietor of the Seagrove Hotel).

Applications for tickets were very numerous compelling the committee to limit the number (perhaps the first indication that this club would also not be big enough).

Evenings of this nature would follow a familiar pattern. The President would propose the health of the Queen and then a large portion of the evening would be taken up with a glut of political speeches and discussion on the various wars taking place at the time. Finally, the toast of the evening "Success to the Sandown Conservative Club". The first annual meeting was held in the Town Hall on June 21st 1883, which may have been to facilitate the number of members wishing to attend. The reports of the Hon. Secretary and Treasurer disclosed the prosperous condition of the club financially

By June 1885 there were nearly 200 members the largest number of members since the club was started in 1878. Club dinners during this period were held at the Oddfellows Hall in Pell Street (this building would eventually metamorphose into the Rivoli Cinema as Pell Street would into Station Avenue).



The second Conservative Club on the corner of Leed Street & Pellmont Road.

A common type of popular entertainment throughout winters at this time were smoking concerts. A typical smoking concert was an evening of entertainment, normally men only, and this type of event, common throughout the country helped popularise music. A concert would include the following: instrumental duets on piano and violin, individual singers, Hungarian dancing, and recitals from books. Chairman and committeemen would perform at these concerts with such ditties as "The place where the old horse died" and evenings would always finish with The National Anthem.

Prosperity continued with 211 paid up members in 1887, not only an increase on the previous year but the largest membership to date with it now considered the best club on the Island.

By June 1891 a joint committee of Conservatives had formed an alliance with the breakaway Liberal Unionists that would develop into another new purposely-built Conservative Club in Sandown. Reasons for the requirement of new premises is uncertain as the existing club in Pellmont Road had as stated been purposely built. The most likely

reason is that due to its success the building was simply yet again not big enough.

In early 1894 a prize of £5 (Approx. £550 in 2012) for a design/plan for another new club in Pell Street, acceptable to the committee, was advertised nationally. There were forty-three applicants and prizes were awarded to the first two selected for consideration. First prize went to Mr. Edgar Hartley of Eccles near Manchester, second prize to Mr. F. H. Dancaster of Boscombe, near Bournemouth.

The accepted plan contained, on the ground floor, a reading room, committee room, secretary's sitting room and a room for the caretakers. ("Caretakers" appear to be the people we recognise today as club stewards as there is reference to them having quarters). They ran the canteen: a place for soft drinks only and refreshments, as of yet there was still no license to permit the sale of alcohol.

The first floor plan showed a billiard room, smoking room, two bedrooms, kitchen, large corridor, lavatories, scullery, a large balcony at the front of the building and at the rear, a lawn.

The estimated cost was £1100. On March 14th 1894 tenders were invited by the committee for the erection of the club. The accepted one was from Mr. F. Colenutt a tradesman of Sandown and the architect, Mr. J. Newman.

A description of the new club circulated at the time read as follows: a large area of ground with a frontage to Pell Street (Station Avenue) specially designed and built for the purpose of a club. The style of the architecture is "Queen Anne's" and the material, Rowland's Castle Red Brick with mouldings.

The cost was put at £1,230, the estimate had been £1,100 and the amount borrowed £1,200. The money to pay for it was loaned by Richard Webster, (The President) a mortgage, at 4½% interest. The date of the Lease was March 26th 1894.

On June 2nd 1894, after 12 years, the last annual meeting at the Pellmont Road club took place. The club was enjoying a prosperous time with a balance of over £81 (£8,900 in 2012) declared and members were looking forward to moving to the new building, currently under construction.

The Pell Street club was officially opened with an inaugural dinner on Friday January 4th 1895 under the new banner of "The Sandown Conservative and Unionist Club". (A Unionist was a person who had opposition to Irish Home Rule. The Liberal Prime Minister William Gladstone had proposed a bill to give Ireland home rule, with both Conservatives and certain Liberals amalgamating in opposition to the bill).

The club at this time had many high profile gentlemen managing it, but one in particular, Surgeon-Capt. Whitchurch, of the Indian Medical Service was made an honorary member for life. Little is documented about Captain Harry Frederick Whitchurch but on March 3rd 1895 at Chitral Fort North West Frontier, India, Surgeon-Captain Whitchurch went to the assistance of a Captain who had been mortally wounded one and a half miles from the fort. The wounded man was placed in a Dhooly, but on the return journey three of the bearers were killed and the fourth severely wounded, so Captain Whitchurch carried the man on his back for the rest of the journey. He later achieved the rank of Surgeon Major and was awarded the Victoria Cross for his bravery.

The Club Registration Certificate to enable them to sell alcohol was applied for on January 8th 1903 by Colonel W.L.N. Clayton (Hon. Secretary and Treasurer), under the Licensing act of 1902 before the Petty Sessional Division of the Isle of Wight. Club opening hours were from 10a.m. until 11p.m. daily, except Saturdays, when it remained open until 11.55p.m. The permitted hours for the supply and consumption of intoxicants was from 11a.m. to 2.30p.m. and 5.30p.m. to 10p.m unless subject to an extension, which would be granted by the Licensing Justices. The Club was not open on Sundays, Christmas Day, Boxing Day or Good Friday.

A letter in the Isle of Wight Chronicle in May 1900 from a Mr. Higgs, having resigned his membership, stated he had recently publicly professed himself a Temperance Advocate, thus being required to abstain from the indulgence of alcohol. He subsequently wrote a letter to the committee informing them that he was "still a staunch Conservative", pointing out that "if at any time your committee were to discontinue the sale of intoxicating drinks at the Club to its members, he would gladly rejoin". A month later along came a bye-election and solely on the Temperance question, Mr. Higgs gave his support to the Liberals. The following Thursday evening a constable brought a parcel found outside the Police Station door (just a few yards away in St. Johns Road) addressed to Mr. Higgs at his home. On being opened the parcel was found to contain six bottles of soda water, with the following note: "To Mr. Frank Higgs, with the compliments of Conservatives and Unionists of Sandown 1062". The figures referred to the Conservative majority but many thought the joke, as tasteless, as the soda water. It certainly showed a little humour amongst the stiff upper lip of Victorian colonialism.

In 1900 the committee purchased an additional strip of land, 30 feet wide by the side of the club, so as to prevent any builders building close to the property. They had acquired the land for an extra rent of £5 per year and they were hopeful of extending the property in the future. The wall on the



boundary of the club was moved and re-built on the new boundary.

Having such a cordial relationship with their benefactor and President, Sir Richard Webster, it appears that he allowed the mortgage repayments to be made as and when the club could afford to do so.

By 1902 the club had paid off £300 of the amount borrowed but only £10 of it had been paid that year. (It would be another 61 years before the loan was fully repaid). This was the club's worst year so far financially but they were solvent and the newly purchased land at the side of the club was now

a bowling green, which was showing a small profit.

The minimum subscription at this period was 5 shillings per year (25p) for the working members and 10 shillings (50p) for the more wealthy gentlemen, who were hoping that 10/- would become the accepted fee across the board. On November 3rd 1903 the Sandown Urban District Council decided to change the name of the road and the club had a new address, 92 Station Avenue. It was re-named Station Avenue from the Station gates to Albert Road. This re-named two roads. Station Road ran as far as the Broadway from the Station gates, with Pell Street continuing from there to Albert Road. One year later on November 4th 1904 the council passed a motion that Bridger Street and Pellmont Street were to be amalgamated and re-named St. Johns Road in their entirety from the High Street to Carter Street.



1906 was a general election year whereby the current Club President, Col. Hickman Morgan, again failed in his bid to enter Parliament, losing to the Liberal candidate, Mr. Godfrey Baring. The following week the would-be M.P. visited Sandown. Encouraged by a crowd of about a 1000 strong he alighted from a motorcar at the top of Beachfield Road and transferred to a horse drawn vehicle. The Colonel and his wife were transported all round the town finishing up at the Conservative Club where he thanked his numerous supporters from the balcony of the Club. (Eminently displayed on the original accompanying photograph).

For some time there had been talk of a proposed Working Men's Conservative Club in the town, which had now come to fruition. It is difficult to understand the reasoning behind this move, as it would reduce the takings at the Station Avenue Club and certainly the membership total. It may have been encouraged

by the aristocrats and landed gentry in order to simply remove a percentage of the working class members, reasoning that the financial position would be acceptably sound without them as they were only paying half of the membership fee that the colonels and likewise were paying.

One of the clubs hierarchies, Colonel Clayton, speaking at a dinner in 1906 refuted the suggestion that they did not want working men in the Station Avenue Club. His suggestion was that the working class members needed a rougher sort of place where they could go in their working clothes, stating that he was convinced that they would make a success of it.

The Working Men's Club was formally opened by Col. A. H. Leith the Conservative and Unionist Candidate for the Island at 10 Wilkes Road, Sandown, in 1908, and during the first five weeks of its existence the membership quickly grew to 231.

Telephone technology was beginning to make its mark in Sandown, the first three connected in the town were, Sharps Timber Yard, No.1, (based in the Railway Station yard), the Railway Offices, Sandown 2 and the Post Office, Sandown 3. The Club had a telephone installed on December 1st 1910, Sandown 60. This enabled members to converse with others without actually being in the club, no doubt regarded as quite a phenomenon in 1910.

A generous gesture from Sir Richard Webster in 1911 was a reduction in the rate of mortgage from the initial 4½% to 4%.

THE AMUSEMENT COMMITTEE
of the
SANDOWN CONSERVATIVE CLUB
(Station Avenue)

begs to notify its supporters that a

WHIST DRIVE

(last of the series)
will be held at the Club to-morrow,
FRIDAY, December 8th,
at 8 p.m.

Tickets, 2/- (including refreshments),
December 8th 1922 advert.

During the 20's & 30's the clubs fortunes fluctuated. There was an appreciable decrease in bar receipts, a most important source of income, which was attributed to the Stock Market Crash of 1929 and the depression era that followed. Whist Drives were a common feature of club activity in order to raise money for Club funds. In 1922 the club suffered for the first time the embarrassment of a loss on the years working of over £67. The deepening depression of the 1930's continued to affect the prosperity of the club throughout the decade. This was the beginning of a slippery slide into debt, so ruling out any future expenditure other than necessities and emergencies.

With only 150 members and approximately 3200 conservatives in the town, members were puzzled as to why, with all its facilities the club was not used more, leaving only a few loyal members to keep the club's head above water.

The small amount of income generated from the clubs Bowling Green all but disappeared when the newly built "Sandham Grounds" opened theirs in 1924. It had drawn most of the local players making the club's green virtually redundant. Suggestions of replacing it with a tennis court or a putting green were dismissed as they had been tried without success but the problem needed resolving in order to gain funds.

Competition from the local Liberal Club had ceased when it closed, but on March 13th 1930 there was a proposal to take over the premises of the club in York Road to form a Social Club. Interested

persons were invited to attend a meeting in the clubroom of the defunct Liberal Club on Monday March 31st at 7.30 p.m. By April 17th a Social Club was open and the subscription fixed at 4 shillings per annum. Mr. J. Carn was the Hon. Secretary.

Despite the depression years, in 1931 central heating was installed, greatly improving the comfort and offering hope that it might encourage more people to use the club.

On Monday June 30th 1932 a brand new 18-hole putting green was opened by the Chairman Mr. H. M. Mew (Browns golf course also opened this year) and in 1935 considerable expenditure was incurred restoring the club's premises.

During the first week of September 1937 Manchester City football team were on a weeks' visit to Sandown. On the Friday night a party of 14 accepted an invitation to be guests of the club. Included in the party were Messrs. W. Smith and Fred Jolly (directors) Mr. N. Wild (Manager) and T. Chorlton. (Trainer). The team played snooker and billiards against club members and travelled to London on the Saturday to play Arsenal in a first division match at Highbury, losing 2-1.

In 1938 for the second time in their comparatively short existence the Working Men's Conservative Club in Wilkes Road found itself involved in a major incident. The police had been watching the club for a number of weeks and decided to raid the premises on Saturday January 8th, entering the club at 10.35pm.

Licensing laws allowed the club to remain open until 11pm but no drinks were to be sold after 10pm with ten minutes being the accepted time allowed to finish a drink. A court case

ensued resulting in the club being struck off the register, disqualifying the premises from being used as a club for six months. It was the end of the road for two separate Conservative Clubs in Sandown, as the Working Men's Club never re-opened their doors again. The benefactors from this rather unfortunate occurrence were more than likely Sandown Social Club.

SANDOWN CONSERVATIVES' PUTTING COURSE.

Sandown has just had added to its seemingly multitudinous recreative facilities yet another sporting centre. We refer to the new public putting course at the Sandown Conservative Club, Station Avenue, which was opened for play on Monday evening.

This 18 holes course has been laid out on the stretch of greensward which was formerly the Club's bowling green and in view of its central situation it should be very well patronised by residents and visitors in search of a quiet hour's past-time.

Mr. H. M. Mew (Chairman of the Club) declared the course open in a very brief speech in which he said their heartiest thanks were due to Mr. J. J. Nicholas to whose energy and foresight the venture was due and Mr. R. Kent for his expert advice. A great many people were averse to playing on the more open courses in full view of the public gaze and the Club's course with its secluded locale would, he thought, fill a long felt want.

Mr. Mew and his good lady played the first game on the course and with his opening shot the Chairman almost holed out in one.

The new putting course opened June 1932.

In late 1939 war had broken out in Europe but life went on at the club and the annual meeting on January 26th 1940 was presided over by the Chairman, Mr. H. M. Mew. From then on annual dinners were cancelled, along with inter Conservative Club matches and club entertainment.

By January 31st 1941, the second year of the war, the situation had started to take its toll on the Club, there was a drop in receipts and the great majority of the club's regular members were either on war work, or appeared in uniforms of the following services, Civil Defence, National Fire Service, Royal Observer Corp or Home Guard. Recruits serving in H. M. Forces were admitted to membership for a nominal fee of 1/- (5p) for the duration of the war.

The thrift club paid out £1,000. 9s to members during December and a collection box run for the benefit of the Sandown Red Cross Supply Depot and the Sandown, Lake and Newchurch District Nursing Association had produced £50.

Finances continued to improve through 1944 with record bar takings of £495, the revenue and expenditure account showing a profit of £200. With hostilities almost at an end the annual dinner was revived and held at the club on January 25th 1945 with great success, having been in abeyance during the war years.

The mortgage had now passed to Sir Richard Webster's estate upon his death in 1915. The two recipients of this mortgage had themselves both passed away by 1941 so on May 13th 1942 the mortgage was transferred to Alfred Shaw Mellor under the common seal of Childs Trustee Company. The amount still owing on the property after 48 years was £750. (Equivalent to £30,000 in 2012).

Alec Brown a well-known billiard professional visited the club on December 2nd 1947. Twice winner of the Daily Mail Gold Cup, semi-finalist in the World's Professional Snooker Championships 1935-36 and 1938-39.

At the annual meeting in February 1949 an unprecedented honour was made to Mr. H. M. Mew, he was made an honorary life Vice President in recognition of his many years service to the club, 26 of them as Chairman. He retired on completing 31 years as Chairman, members presenting him with an armchair in recognition of his long untiring services for the Club.

The 1950's would prove a most testing time for the club. From 1950 to 1955 only 1954 showed a small profit, continuous hardship and possible closure blighted the club throughout this period. At the start of this decade there were still 220 members, the highest since January 1903. On the face of it, highly satisfactory, in reality it proved not to be.

Clubs of this nature were run by men for men, to involve women in any capacity other than as occasional guests was unthinkable. Times change and they did, as on January 26th 1950 ladies celebrated their first annual night at the Trouville Hotel. Probably then realising that more income would be forthcoming if ladies were involved in the club the library was converted into a ladies room where members could entertain their wives and lady friends. The ladies position however was put into perspective by the Chairman who stated, "ladies could only be introduced as guests and their use of the club's premises would be restricted to their own room".

Further concessions were made to the ladies in 1954. Among measures agreed, were, admission to the billiard room as well as the library. The reason for this was the almost complete absence of visitors during the summer months because wives and lady friends were not permitted to accompany the men to the bar. As the billiards room adjoined the main bar the problem would be eradicated (the bar was upstairs). For all of these concessions they were still not entitled to membership.

With money tight, to add insult to injury, on Tuesday 24th August 1954 the club was broken into with cash and jewellery to the amount of over £277 stolen. (Approx. £6400 in 2012).

The slight improvement in the income during late 1954 and May 1955 was generated from a new darts competition.

George Meguyer a local businessman connected with horse racing had named his house "Melbourne" in Avenue Road. He donated a cup, suitably named "The Melbourne Cup" to be played for on a knock out basis, the main stipulation was that all games must be played at the Club.

Being the first year (1954 - 1955 season) it was mainly a local event whereas in forthcoming years it attracted teams from all over the Island. Sandown Conservative Club won the first ever Melbourne Cup defeating the Wheatsheaf from Brading by 4 games to 3, it would take until 1968 before the Club would once again covet this much desired trophy. This competition provided the club with a great source of revenue for many years to come. I would suggest that, without the Melbourne Cup's additional revenue, the Club's situation would at this time have been critical if not terminal.

This competition grew to be very competitive with the best teams from all over the Island eventually competing for it, with immense prestige attached to winning it, thus proving to be very lucrative venture for the club in their hour of need.

During 1955, in desperation, a suggestion to improve the club's financial position had become a firm commitment. It was to sell the land surrounding the club premises. By now the area was completely over run by nature and in need of attention. The membership in 1955 had dropped to a mere 87 persons. On February 23rd 1956 a special meeting was convened between members of the Sandown and Shanklin Urban District Council, representatives of Sandown Conservative Club and their Solicitor, at the Town Hall regarding the councils objective of acquiring land at the side and

rear of the Club. A Council sub-committee had viewed the land and the Club's representatives agreed to recommend to their Committee the acceptance of the proposed terms, i.e. £400 for the plot at the side of the Club premises fronting to Station Avenue and a further £50 for the land at the rear of the Club, a total of £450. This was duly confirmed in writing, with only two members opposing the sale.

In May the District Valuer reported favourably on proposals to acquire the land for a car park. One positive thought by the club's committee was that opening up the York Road end would provide a more convenient approach to the club from the centre of the main shopping area, therefore attracting more members.



This photograph features a mix of Sandown members and some of the people from Brading who joined the club in the late 1950's.
Standing. ?, Ken Wetherick, Arthur Cox, Tony Guy and Norman Smart.
Sitting back row. H. Woodmore, Les Briggs, Tony Arnold & Walt Locke.
Front row. ? Fred Pink, Jim Harbour and Bob Keefe. (Steward).
Ladies from the left. Thora Keefe, Mrs Locke, Mrs Cox, Pam Wetherick & Mrs Wetherick. **Front row.** Mrs Alma Smart.
The only two Sandown members featured are Messrs. Guy and Smart.

On December 30th 1957 the land at the back of the Club which had been an integral part of the original land purchase, coupled with the extra piece of land at the side purchased by the committee during 1899 to stop any close building to the Club, was sold to the Sandown and Shanklin Urban District Council for £450. Speculation is that the £450 paid by the Council for the sale of the land was immediately absorbed by club debts, including rates owed to the Council.

The completion of the car park allowed entry from York Road as well as Station Avenue. This required the compulsory purchase of two houses by the Council at a cost of £3,500. No. 10, Milton House and No. 12, Spencer Villa in York Road, these were demolished and the present car park completed. Parking charges were not introduced immediately but the car park quickly became a dumping ground for unlicensed cars and other indiscretions, which inevitably accelerated the process of charging for the pleasure of parking there.



Brading Conservative and Unionist Club, 1930.

Neither the snooker or dart teams had enjoyed much success since their formation in 1956 and with the grand total of only 73 members in 1958 something had to change quickly or the Club could not possibly have paid its way and the doors would have closed.

In its hour of need the Club attracted the attention of a group of people from Brading. Brading Conservative Club had never re-opened after the war and the two main hostleries in the village were the Bugle Inn and The Wheatsheaf, which shared the leisure time of the local men for their drinking and social activities.

Playing in the first three finals of The Melbourne Cup they were drawn to becoming members of this "rather run down club". The nucleus of the Wheatsheaf dart team and a few of their supporters joined the Club sometime in the latter half of 1958. Within a year the club re-entered the East Wight Dart League with six members of the Wheatsheaf Melbourne Cup side in the team.

The committee was soon revitalised with the nucleus of the existing committee and a few of the recently joined Brading contingent, all keen on restoring the Club's fortunes. Revaluation was

proposed, with a view to raising a further mortgage and seconded with the view that something had to be done to improve facilities within the Club. An agreed decision was that before any further mortgage was taken up an extraordinary general meeting would have to be convened. In an effort to encourage visitors to the Club, a welcome sign was purchased and exhibited at the 'front entrance of the Club' in an effort to attract new members. (To be continued).

The finances were still in the red in late 1958 and in desperation it was agreed that a small sum of money contained in a post office savings account, would be withdrawn and placed in the bank to offset the overdraft. In a further effort to raise money, the game of Tombola was introduced at the club. (Tombola is a kind of lottery with tickets drawn from a drum and sums of money or small fancy articles as prizes).

From the outset of this coalition committee (part Brading members and part Sandown) there was a wind of change blowing through the Club. For many years a stubborn fortress of Victoriana, which had not brought prosperity, but at least had sustained itself until recent times.

A national decline in the political side of club life and competition from other rising social attractions had many clubs struggling to survive. The new committee quickly began pursuing a vigorous fund raising policy with intentions of making sweeping changes to the club.

The early 1960's brought about an infusion of younger members who wanted a dinner coupled with an evening of professional entertainment. They would accept two or three short speeches, probably delivered by the President, Chairman and Treasurer but after that it was off to the dance floor via the bar. This generation were not the least interested in listening to long drawn out speeches and political debates as took place when the Club was run by Colonels, Majors and the town's leading lights.

During 1960 part of the club frontage was re-painted and the entrance given a new look, even a Ladies Powder Room was contemplated, a far cry from the mainly masculine tradition of the club. The main hall, (now absorbed into the present lounge) was cleared of its collection of fading photographs of yesteryear, antique pianos and the door complete with a spy hole which induced memories of long forgotten private society meetings, which had not been quite as private as contemplated. All the books from the now defunct Club Library were disposed of during the year probably including a lot of the Club's history.

Plans were that the 65-year-old Conservative Hall so often the launching pad for Politicians, Colonels, Majors and M.P.s to expound their views, was to be turned into a lounge bar if they could raise the money. On approaching various brewers for financial assistance towards this venture the reply was, that owing to the brewers union frowning on such activities no help could be given.

There was now a municipal car park developing at the back door, whereby members could park their car. I doubt anybody had contemplated paying for the privilege. The selling of the adjacent land was far from an asset as it disallowed any possibility of expansion forever, imprisoning the Club forever within its four walls.

Even with the younger and enthusiastic committee, money was still tight in 1960. On applying for the Club Registration Certificate at the Petty Sessions, they could only account for 101 members, still not enough to keep the club solvent. An appeal was put out to any Conservatives in the town to subscribe toward the cost of the proposed first-class lounge bar on the ground floor. It was also decreed that the works committee would be empowered to draw up a list of donors, but must ensure that details of sums donated be treated in strict confidence. Members were requested to lend money to the Club with a guarantee that it would be fully repaid if the financial climate improved. Many did and were eventually repaid.

With the impending new lounge bar, secretaries of organisations that rented the reading room were informed that it would no longer be available, namely, the Oddfellows and various Whist Drives etc;

Antiquated, uncomfortable and gloomy were some of the reasons given by many for not using or joining the Club in the past few years and there were still only eleven applications for membership during 1960.

Officially opened in 1895 the Club had seen better days. Decline had set in over the past few years with imminent closure a strong possibility. However, through the hard work of the committee and the enthusiastic support of a small number of members things changed for the better. The beginning of a new and brighter era was seen on Friday May 5th 1961 when the new and spacious Lounge Bar was officially opened by the Island Member of Parliament, Alderman Mark Woodnutt.



The new lounge bar opened in 1961.

The new bar occupied the former reading room and was equipped with pumps serving no less than six different draught beers in addition to a wide range of bottled beverages. It was attractively decorated with contemporary wallpaper and comfortable furniture although there were already rumours circulating that the committee had more extensive renovations planned in the near future. The committee decided not to have their newly acquired fruit machines installed for the opening

night in order to maintain a sense of occasion, their installation shortly afterwards proved very lucrative for the Club in their time of need and in the forthcoming years.

The following are the elected committee that changed the Club's fortunes in 1961;

President, Alderman Mark Woodnutt, M. P.

Chairman, Mr. A. Kingham. Vice Chairman, Mr. A. Guy Hon. Secretary, Mr. N. Smart. Hon. Treasurer, Mr. L. R. Briggs.

General Committee: - Messrs. F. D. Millership, J. Hayden, T. Corlett, A. Meguyer, P. Sherry and A. Arnold. Club Preservation Committee: - Messrs. F. Millership and T. Corlett.

Bar Committee: - Messrs. A. Guy, N. Smart and J. Hayden.

Sports Committee: - Messrs. A. Arnold (Secretary), A. Meguyer, A. Cox and K. Wetherick.

Time at the meeting was given to reflecting on the change in the Club's fortunes over the past two years. The gloomy forecast then was the possibility of closing the doors, but now it was a different story. The Victorian gloom had made way for an attractive lounge bar, rated as one of the best on the South Coast. A profit of £96 compared to a deficit of £170 for 1960 and an increase in membership by 25%.

The Club had moved from red to black, visitors were queuing up for temporary membership in their hundreds during the summer months and local membership rocketed every month for years.

Details of the 1961 committee.

Arthur Kingham. Ran Rosebank Guest House at No. 6 High Street Sandown.

Tony Guy. Garage proprietor, the sole survivor of this committee.

Norman Smart. Guest House proprietor at 87 Station Avenue.

Les Briggs. Insurance salesman from Brading.

F. D. (Doug) Millership. Owned the Newsagents at No. 4 Albert Road.

Tony Arnold. Brading plumber. Devoted many hours of voluntary time to the club.

Tom Corlett. Tobacconists shop at 87 High Street Sandown.

Ken Wetherick. Chimney sweep from New Road Brading.

Arthur Meguyer. Taxi business at No. 2 Crescent Road Sandown.

Arthur Cox. Bricklayer from Brading.

Peter Sherry. Hotel proprietor, "Devonia" Morton common.

Jack. Hayden. Building trader.

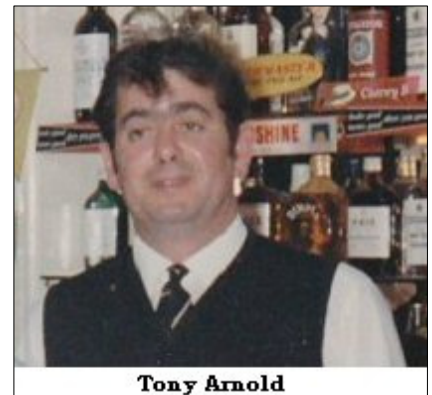
This concludes the story of Sandown Conservatives Club's early years.



**Doug Millership's newsagency in
Albert Road, Sandown. Circa 1960.**



**Tom Corlett a leading light on
the Committee when the club
was in dire straights in the 1950's.**



Tony Arnold



Arthur Kingham



**The opening of the new Lounge Bar on
Friday May 5th 1961 by Mark Woodnutt M.P.**