

Club History

The first

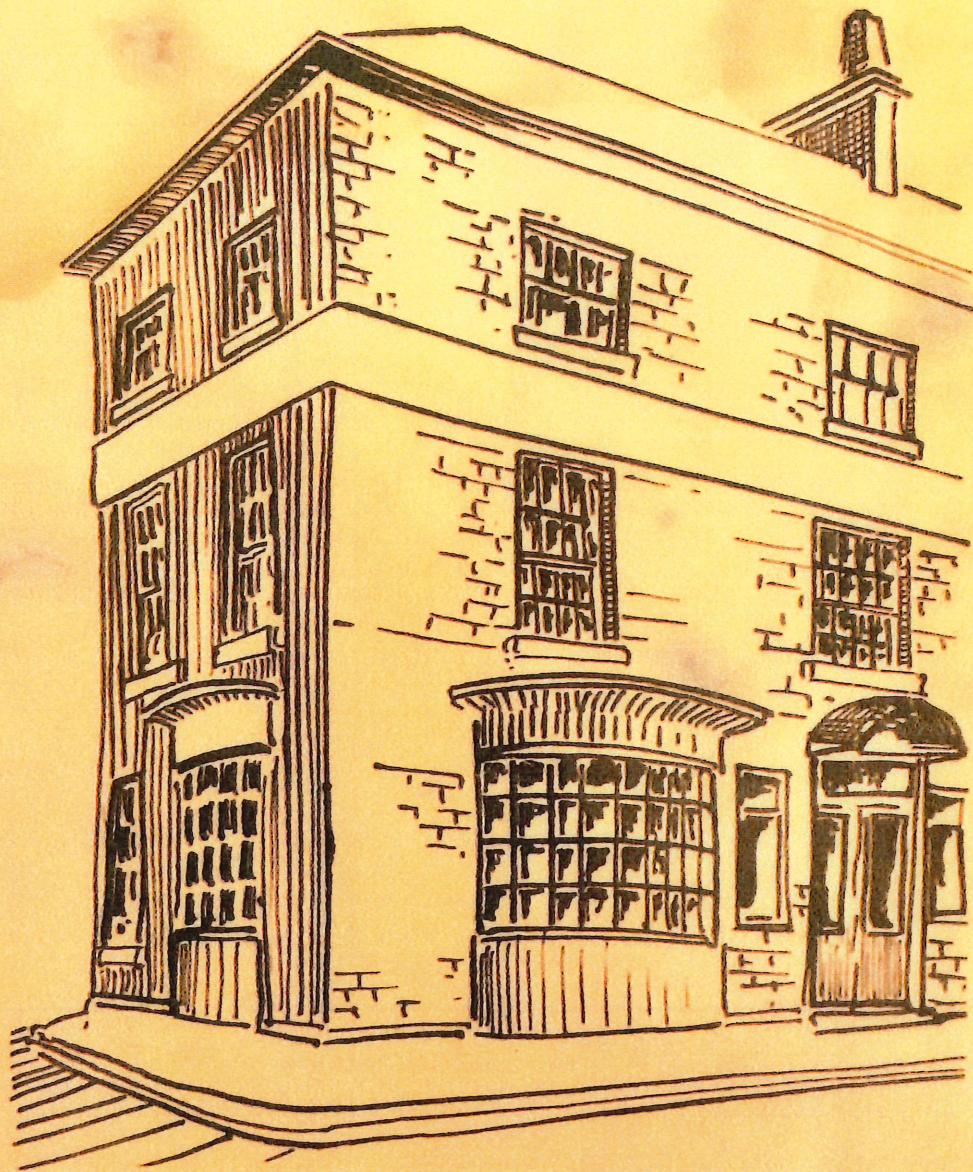
50 Years

**This is a true copy of the
Original Commemorative
booklet printed in 1977.**

**Kindly donated by
Jacqui Dewhurst**

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returned to the notice
board after use.**

Thank you.



· LONDON HOUSE · 1927



FOREWORD
BY
THE PRESIDENT
MR. S. H. PRITCHARD

As you know 1977 is the Golden Jubilee of the Alcester Unionist Club which we intend to celebrate in this important year — it also being the Silver Jubilee of H.M. The Queen.

Our Club was opened on March 9th 1927 and was honoured to have as its first President Lord Seymour. I wish to place on record and express on your behalf our debt of gratitude to the Founder Members for their great foresight and good business sense. Their hard work has provided a centre where all men, of whatever rank, can enjoy good friendship. The principle of the Club is to serve, through recreation, the social needs of the locality. Some of our members have played an active part in the many institutions of this ancient town and this they have done with distinction and credit.

The Club now completely re-decorated and modernised is living proof of the vitality and foresight of the present Committee. As your President I wish to place on record and express our sincere appreciation on behalf of all the members to the Chairman Mr. J. Mahoney, the Secretary Mr. G. W. Quigley, the Treasurer Mr. H. Jones and the Vice-President Mr. R. H. Davies; also the whole Committee for their very hard work and infinite care which they have put into this mammoth task.

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

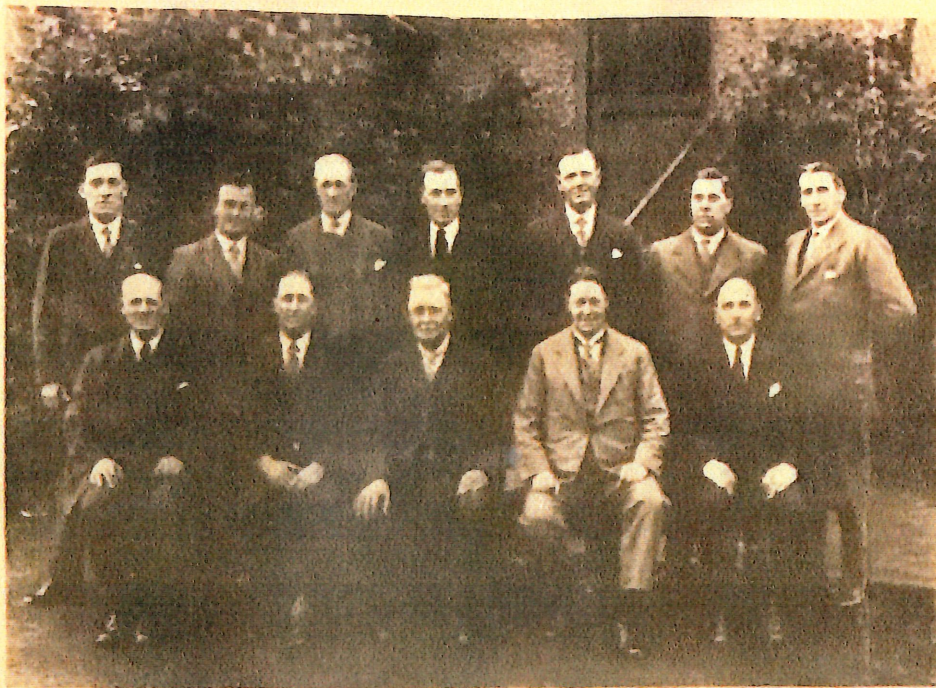
It is indeed an honour for me to make a contribution to this souvenir booklet. I have been privileged to lead the Committee during the period when the Club's financial state has become secured and healthy, the modernisation of the entire building completed and the celebrations of the 50th Anniversary about to be enjoyed. The past few years for the Committee have been arduous and demanding, nevertheless, they have been exciting and challenging years too. Those on the Committee have responded to these demands with vigour and determination and I hope their hard work and efforts have pleased our other members.

There were occasional periods, long ago, when the Club was rather inactive and uninspiring. As we move into the next fifty years I firmly believe that the energy, experience and enthusiasm which we now have, must be maintained and directed, as at present, to the well being of all our members and also towards their future interests. It is our responsibility to build upon the achievements of all those who have gone before us; we owe them much; we must do our best for those who follow us.

Our Club is successful because we have a wealth of vitality and potential and it is a meeting place where members can enjoy the best of good humour, goodwill and good fellowship.

Long may it so remain.

JOHN MAHONEY (Chairman).



FOUNDERS 1927

E. G. Hunt, A. Quiney, C. Corbett,
 A. C. Baylis, J. W. Fisher, L. Ison, A. C. Stewart.
 F. Dyson, G. H. Hopkins, K. Hawtin, W. G. Ison, C. Hunt.
Secretary. Treasurer. Chairman.



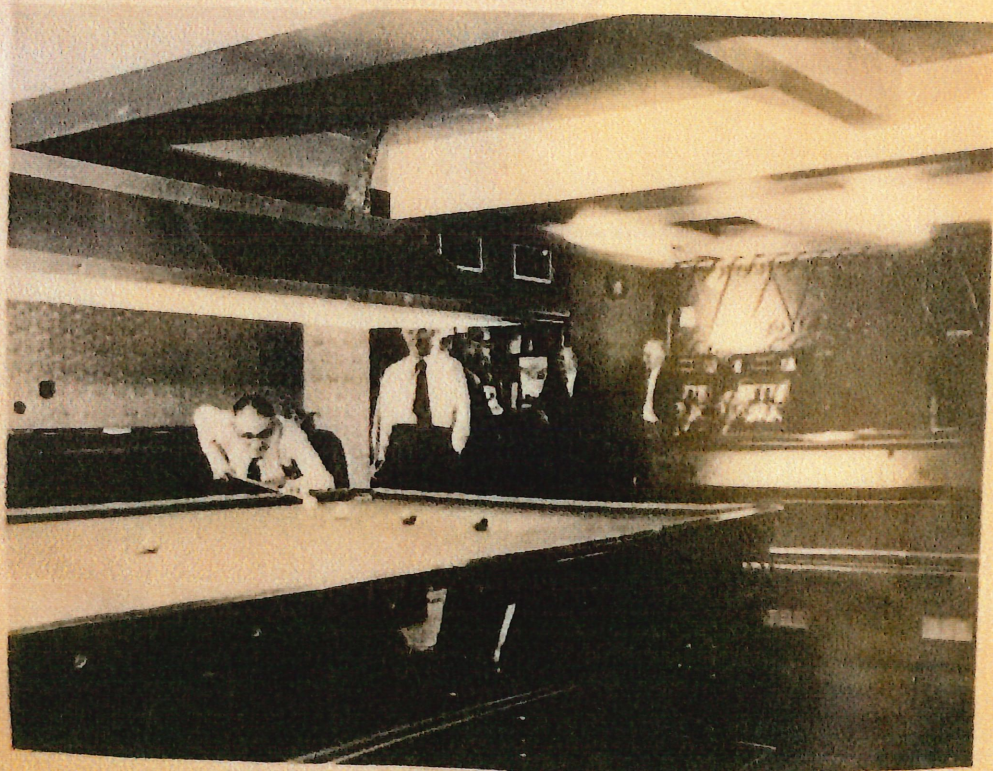
OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE 1977

Back Row l. to r.: D. Hughes, N. Lupton, M. Daffern, P. Timms, R. H. Hughes,
 E. Taylor, R. F. Smith, R. Weatherhead.
Front Row l. to r.: G. Weigand G. W. Quigley (*Secretary*),
 J. Mahoney (*Chairman*), S. H. Pritchard (*President*),
 R. H. Davies (*Vice-President*), H. H. Jones (*Treasurer*), W. Vagstaff.



Above is a corner of the lounge showing members with their ladies and the Club Steward and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. W. Rogers, behind the bar. In the foreground chatting together are Cyril Bennett (on the left) and Reg Grummett, who have between them eighty-nine years of active membership.

Below is a view of the games room with a snooker game in progress.



THE FIRST 50 YEARS

A peep into the archives with John Mahoney and Bob Davies.

A meeting was held on the 18th October 1926 at High Street, Alcester. There were present — Messrs. K. Hawtin, C. Corbett, A. Quiney, A. C. Baylis, W. Ison, L. Ison, F. Dyson, E. G. Hunt, C. H. Hunt, J. W. Fisher, A. C. Stewart and G. H. Hopkins. Mr. W. Ison was appointed Chairman, Mr. G. H. Hopkins, Secretary and Mr. K. Hawtin, Treasurer.

“It was proposed by Mr. K. Hawtin, seconded by Mr. A. C. Baylis that a Club be formed which shall be called The Alcester Unionist Club Ltd., with registered offices in High Street, Alcester.”

At this same meeting, Lord Henry Seymour was elected President of the Club.

Up until this time the only meeting place for social and recreational activities was the front room of 49, High Street, which was known as the Reading Room. There was space for only one card table and about a dozen persons, consequently, the air was always thick with tobacco smoke. A group of retired business men were determined to have better facilities in which to spend their spare time and so London House, previously a café, was bought for £400 at an auction sale where K. Hawtin, representing the group, was the only member of the public present. Alcester Builders started alterations which were to cost £450 and further meetings, held at K. Hawtin's house, were concerned with drawing up a set of rules and arranging for each member to deposit £25 on loan.

By the end of January 1927, the Club had been registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act, accepted for membership by the Association of Conservative Clubs, had approved a further 47 members, appointed a steward and purchased a billiard table for £52. During the next few weeks orders were placed with local breweries for bitter beer to retail at 7d per pint and mild beer to sell at 6d per pint; brandy was to sell at 9d per glass and gin at 6½d, while whisky and rum were each 7d, although whisky *with* soda was to be 8d! Mr. W. Ison was authorised to purchase various chairs, tables and an umbrella stand, and orders were placed for bar equipment, including glasses, funnels, measures, one counter bell and six copper spittoons! At the

end of February, the membership had increased by a further 65, the alterations had been completed, so the premises were made available for use on the 3rd of March and the Club was officially opened by the President on Wednesday, the 9th of March 1927.

Very soon, billiard competitions were in full swing; a whist drive, a concert and Ladies Night were all held in April and those members who liked to keep up with events had the choice of four daily newspapers and five weekly journals and magazines. Things did not always run smoothly though, and on the 25th April, the Secretary reported to the committee on a conversation between a member of the Club and a Mr. W., regarding statements made to the effect that the committee had admitted Bolsheviks and prominent Liberals as members of the Club! A charabanc trip to Ascot was made in June, while back in the Club the charge for snooker was fixed at 1/- per game for four or six persons.

The following year found the Secretary writing to a Mr. F, informing him "that he must not use the Club when he was not sober". In this year too, it was resolved "that the 1st of September be the date of the children's outing and if possible they should be taken to Stanway — children aged six to twelve to be taken and Alcester Co-operative Society be asked to cater for the tea, which should consist of two kinds of bread and butter, slab and fancy cake". About this time, members were asked to refrain from smoking over the table, nor to toss coins thereon, and those who liked only to *watch* the more intricate techniques of card play were asked to "refrain from passing remarks on the cards held by players during the course of the game".

Heating the premises was then, as it still is now, a major item of expense, and perhaps as an early illustration of bulk buying, the Secretary was instructed to purchase a truck of coal — at 38/- per ton!

Over the next few years, the Club continued to flourish and expand its membership and contacts, resulting in many friendly matches of snooker being played against other clubs in Studley and Stratford. A venture to use the cardroom for airgun shooting did not find many supporters, but in 1932 a ping pong table was purchased and a sub-committee was delegated to see if the coalhouse was large enough for table tennis to be played there.

During the whole of the Thirties the Club continued to prosper, although nationally it was a time of economic difficulties. The well-being and interests

of the members were always of prime importance and during this period two card rooms were in popular use; in addition, a small library was formed with a loan charge of one penny per book. In 1933, a cricket match against Alcester and Ragley C.C. was arranged as well as a trip to the circus at Worcester. In 1934, Club facilities were offered to the Warwickshire Yeomanry who were stationed in Ragley Park for a time, but later that year "an application for the use of the card room for a Cinematograph Show, advertising cigarettes, was not entertained".

Interest in table tennis was waning somewhat, so the table and set were sold for 55/- and airgun shooting took its place with several matches arranged against other clubs. A Special General Meeting in 1935 resolved to close the bar every lunch time except Saturday, but the welcome to members' wives and friends was further extended by the provision of a coal fire in an upstairs room! The following year saw the first move towards the Club acquiring the Bowling Green, although final agreement was not reached until many years later. Indoor games continued to flourish and the Club bought its first dartboard. Competitions were always popular, although one can only guess what remarks were made when it was found that the horses running 2nd and 3rd in the Grand National had not been included in the draw!

An important event in Club history took place in 1938 — the first step towards the formation of the Club as we now know it — when the Committee authorised the purchase of the adjacent house for the sum of £400, the money to be raised by a loan from the members.

The immediate impact of the war in 1939 was the effect of higher taxation on the cost of drinks — beer was now 8d per pint, cigarettes 7d for ten and whisky 14/3d per bottle. An impact of another kind though, was felt when a Committee member volunteered to black out the lamp in the lavatory and the steward was granted permission to sleep in the telephone room because of the air-raids. The problem of lighting in the yard and lavatory was not solved immediately though, and the opinion of the Inspector of Police was requested. Extra supplies of whisky were purchased whenever possible and also a stirrup pump and fire buckets. By 1941 a shortage of beer was the cause of the bar opening time to be 8.30 p.m., whisky was now 11d per drop and for Christmas each member was allowed to buy only one bottle of whisky.

Petrol rationing was affecting the more distant members and in November the steward reported to the Committee that "some person unknown had been

responsible for an indiscreet action in the yard of the Club premises". The Committee, taking a serious view, agreed that if the perpetrator of this misdeed were found, the matter would be dealt with in the "proper manner". The Christmas of 1942 found members restricted to half a bottle of whisky, and by the following March the use of the billiard table was not allowed after 10 p.m. so as to economise on fuel. Also, at this time, a gold watch, purchased with money donated by the members, was presented to Mr. G. H. Hopkins. The inscription read as follows — "From members of the Alcester Unionist Club Ltd. to Mr. G. H. Hopkins on his retirement as Secretary. Faithful service 1927-1942".

As the war dragged on, seemingly forever, the main effect on members was a shortage of both petrol and beer, and in the years of austerity which followed, Club life became very dull and ordinary. At one stage, because of a beer shortage, Club hours were restricted from 8.15 to 9.45 p.m. and the only incidents to break the monotony was a fire in the steward's flat and a non-member being discovered fishing, literally, in troubled Club waters. In this year too, 1946, a complaints book procedure was started and perhaps as a consequence, the steward's attention was drawn to the abundance of cobwebs in the lavatory! Comment and opinion about the use of the billiard table was as frequent then as now, and in 1949 members were requested to refrain from attempting the jump shot!

An important event occurred in 1951 when the members at the A.G.M. unanimously approved a motion to take over the assets and liabilities of the Alcester Bowling Club and in the following October the Bowling Green was acquired at a cost of £150. Shortly afterwards, in 1952/3, the Club was without a Secretary for about nine months as no-one could be found for the post, made vacant because the previous Secretary had left the district. The Club struggled on in spite of this difficulty and some members were pleased to find that space was made in the dart room for their bicycles.

Another landmark in Club history occurred in 1957, when until now playing only friendly matches, the Club first entered a team in the Redditch Snooker league. This was a venture in which it was hoped that the Club might move out of its state of inertia and apathy, which had already lasted too long, and develop into a more interesting and vigorous organisation. Money was very short though, so short in fact, that the Committee felt unable to approve the purchase of a new cloth for the billiard table at a cost of £38. Fortunately, enthusiasm was high and the snooker team rallied other members and undertook

to raise half the cost of a new cloth. By much effort, hard work and help from members' wives, a jumble sale was organised, which raised a sum of £19.17.3d, so the snooker season of 1958 started with a new cloth on the table and the following year two teams were entered in the league.

Yet another landmark occurred in 1961. The Club purchased a secondhand fruit machine for £275. Subsequent events have proved that this was the turning point in the Club's finances and together with the additional income from a second machine, bought a year later, the Committee was now able to consider some long-term planning. The adjacent premises had become empty and an architect was instructed to prepare plans for extensive alterations. At the A.G.M. of 1962 the members approved the plans in principle and after further modifications a special general meeting in 1963 authorised the Committee to carry them out. In November, a tender for £14,400 for the work was accepted and the builders moved in after Christmas. In order to finance the scheme a members' loan fund was started but the bulk of the cost was borne by a loan from the Club's Bankers.

In March 1964, the Club suffered a grievous blow by the sudden death of its President, Harry Hopkins. He was a founder member, first secretary for 15 years, then treasurer for 8 years and President for the previous 14 years. The members had always accorded him much respect and affection and had come to depend almost entirely on his wisdom, experience and judgement. His death was indeed a great loss, made all the more tragic in that he was never to see the final result of his hopes and plans for the Club.

In spite of this setback and although finances were in a critical state at this stage, the Club succeeded in keeping its head above water — only just — and a year later the main reconstruction work had been completed and the second billiard table bought for £15. The Committee had already decided to open at mid-day as soon as finances and conditions would allow, but a group of members became very impatient at the delay and petitioned at a special General Meeting for daytime opening to start immediately. However, the members at the following A.G.M. overwhelmingly rejected the motion to do this and furthermore, by a similar huge margin, declared a vote of confidence in the Committee. At this time, the original 1927 subscription of one guinea was doubled, a television set was installed in the lounge and two years later the first exhibition by a snooker professional was held.

Continued on page 15.

50th ANNIVERSARY



FRIDAY 25th MARCH — 50th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

To be held in the Club at 8.30 p.m.

The President, Mr. S. H. Pritchard will preside.



FRIDAY 1st APRIL — SNOOKER EVENING

Snooker professional Jack Rea will play a challenge match against a team of club members.

Jack Rea has won many honours in the world of professional snooker and has appeared many times on television. His expertise on the snooker table and his bubbling Irish humour have made him a firm favourite and we are glad to welcome him on this return visit as part of our celebrations.

He will play an exhibition billiards match against J. Mahoney followed by a snooker match in which he will concede 200 points on aggregate score over six frames. The Club will be represented by J. Corfield, G. Hall, J. Spilsbury, R. Thomas, J. Vernon, K. Worthy and K. Grummett. A display of trick shots will conclude the evening's entertainment.



SATURDAY 16th APRIL — "AS WE WERE" LADIES' NIGHT

This will take the form of a social evening for members and their ladies and to make the occasion a real success, it is hoped that everyone will dress in the fashion and style of the Twenties. For all those who do, there will be vouchers for some free drinks, while all other drinks will sell at 5 pence or 10 pence each. The best dressed couple will win two bottles of champagne and the runners up will receive one bottle of champagne. There will be raffles, music and a lavish buffet.



FRIDAY 22nd APRIL — GAMES EVENING

Two teams of members picked at random will play on aggregate score. Each frame will be restricted by a time limit.

There will also be other competitions, including cards, darts and dominoes.

CELEBRATIONS 1977

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FRIDAY 29th APRIL — ANNIVERSARY DINNER

Hannah Susan Greig Memorial Hall, Alcester.

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MENU

PRAWN COCKTAIL

—
GAME SOUP

—
BEEF BOURGUIGNON

Prime English Beef marinated in red wine and served with
button mushrooms, diced bacon and sliced onions.

with

Baby Carrots, Brussels Sprouts and New Potatoes.

—
FRUIT SALAD AND CREAM

—
SELECTION OF ENGLISH CHEESES

—
BISCUITS

—
COFFEE

TOASTS

HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN

ALCESTER UNIONIST CLUB

Proposed by: L. G. WATERMAN, ESQ.,
Secretary of the Association of Conservative Clubs.

Response: S. H. PRITCHARD, ESQ.,
Club President.

OUR GUESTS

Proposed by: J. MAHONEY, ESQ.,
Club Chairman.

Response: ANGUS MAUDE, ESQ.
Member of Parliament for Stratford-upon-Avon.

OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

Proposed by: P. E. WHEELER, ESQ.

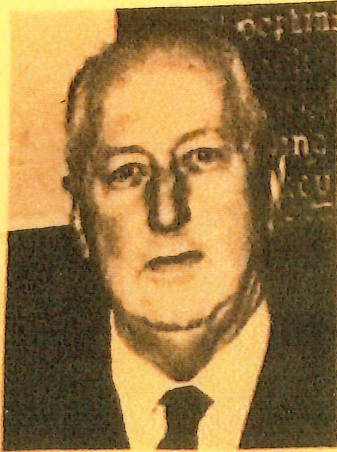
Response: G. QUIGLEY, ESQ.,
Club Secretary.

Toastmaster: E. R. GRUMMETT, ESQ.

CABARET

JOAN and TERRY (Music and Mime) JESS YOUNG (Guitar-Vocalist)
TOMMY MUNDEN (Comedian)

OUTSTANDING SERVICE



HARRY HOPKINS was one of the Founders and undoubtedly the outstanding member of the first fifty years. He was Secretary from 1927 to 1942, Treasurer from 1942 to 1950 and President from 1950 until his death in 1964. He was prominent in business as well as being both a district and county councillor and also an ex High Bailiff.



BILL ISON was a Founder member and on the Committee until 1938. In this period he was Chairman between 1927 and 1931 and was President in the year 1937-38. He was made an Honorary Member several years ago and died only fairly recently. He was well known in business and town affairs and was an ex High Bailiff.



ARTHUR BAYLIS was a Founder member and in 1935 was elected Chairman, a post he held for the next eighteen years, until his death in 1953. He also took a prominent part in the Bowling Club. He was a local farmer, business man and an ex High Bailiff.



CON CORBETT was a Founder and served on the Committee until 1935. He was Chairman for the last four years of this period, 1931-35. Right up to his death in June 1961 he was a keen and enthusiastic player of both snooker and bowls. He was a district councillor and well known local farmer.

ALBERT QUINEY is the sole surviving Founder. He served on the Committee from 1927 until 1935 when his work took him away from the district. He has since returned to resume active membership and lives in Alcester although he is now retired. He was made an Honorary Member several years ago and still retains considerable interest in Club affairs. On this 50th anniversary he wishes the best of success to the members and the Club in the future.



BERT GRUMMETT became a member in 1927. He joined the Committee in 1934 and with great dedication served until his death in 1974. He was Chairman from 1960 to 1971, was made a Life Member in 1967 and a Vice-President in 1971. He was a member of the original snooker team in 1957 and was extremely prominent in Bowling Club and Fishing Club activities.

JOHN MAHONEY became a member in 1951 and has been on the Committee since 1953. He was Secretary from 1954 to 1956 and has been Chairman since 1971. He is a schoolmaster, following the profession of his grandfather, who was also a very active member between 1927 and 1941. He was a member of the original snooker team in 1957 and still plays for a Club team.



BOB DAVIES became a member in 1954. He was elected Secretary two years later which was the start of a remarkable nineteen years period in that office until 1975 when he was made a Vice-President. He has been a Registrar for several years and his long experience as an officer in local government contributed in no small way to both his success as Secretary and the success of the Club.



HARRY JONES became a member in 1955, joined the Committee in 1961 and has been Treasurer since 1971. He was an electrical engineer before retirement and has given invaluable technical assistance and advice over a long period. He was the prime mover in the Club joining a snooker league in which he played for many years.



GILL QUIGLEY became a member in 1964 and has been a Committee man for several years since that time. He was invited to be Secretary in 1976 and although retired from work he has been totally involved in the present anniversary events and Club modernisation. He is also extremely active in promoting various charities.

OFFICERS 1927-77.

PRESIDENT

1927—37 BRIG. GEN. LORD
HENRY SEYMOUR.
1937—38 W. G. ISON.
1938—50 S. HARWOOD.
1950—64 G. H. HOPKINS.
1965 S. H. PRITCHARD.

CHAIRMAN

1927—31 W. G. ISON.
1931—35 C. CORBETT.
1935—53 A. C. BAYLISS.
1953—60 C. HUNT.
1960 L. SISAM
1960—71 A. E. GRUMMETT.
1971 J. MAHONEY.

SECRETARY

1927—42 G. H. HOPKINS.
1942—48 F. SPOONER.
1948—52 W. G. BARTON
1953—54 J. BOLAS.
1954—56 J. MAHONEY
1956—75 R. H. DAVIES.
1975 G. TAYLOR
1976 G. QUIGLEY.

TREASURER

1927—35 K. HAWTIN.
1935—38 P. A. BAYLIS.
1938—42 F. SPOONER.
1942—50 G. H. HOPKINS.
1950—55 F. SPOONER.
1955—60 L. SISAM
1960—70 C. BRUCE.
1971 H. JONES.

THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS—*continued.*

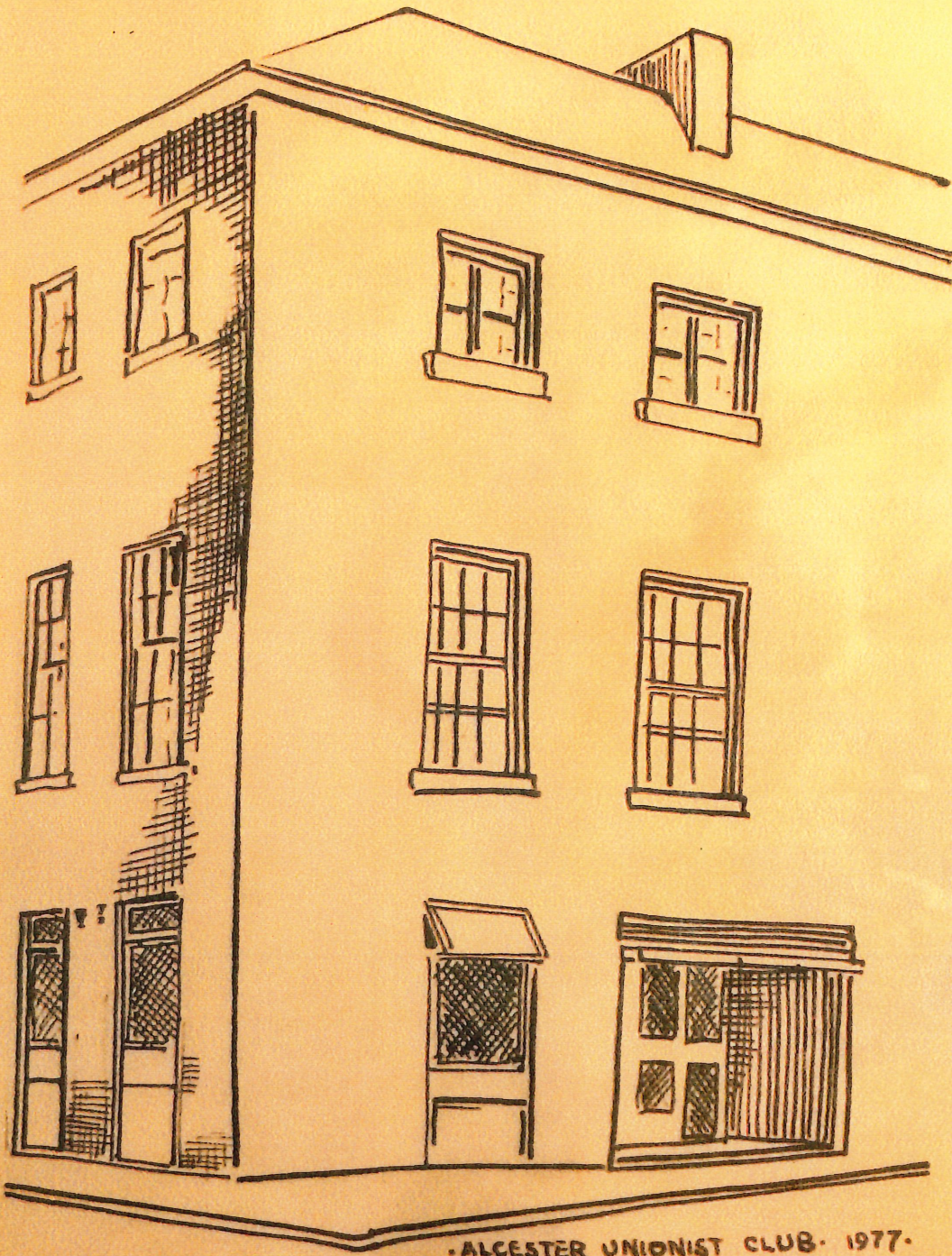
In the autumn of 1969, the "A" team transferred to the recently formed Stratford snooker league, to be followed two years later by the "B" team. This move brought immediate reward to the "A" team which became First Division champions in four successive years — 1970, 71, 72 and 73, and two individual and two pairs competitions were also won in this period. In 1970, a colour television set appeared in the lounge and an unprecedented election fever spread like wild fire, as 15 candidates sought approval from the Club electorate to fill 7 committee vacancies! Two years later, a joining fee was instituted, extra opening hours from 12—2 p.m. every day started and preliminary planning to improve the games room was begun. The following year saw the establishment of an improvements policy by the Committee, the admission of ladies to the lounge at any time when the Club was open and the reporting by the Secretary that the cooler in the cellar had "given up the ghost"! In 1974, at the A.G.M., the members approved in principle the policy of improvements as outlined by the Chairman.

In the autumn of 1975, after nineteen years as Secretary, R. H. Davies retired from office. As an appreciation of his services he was elected a Vice-President and was presented with a Hi-fi stereo unit at a most successful social evening attended by many members and their wives. The occasion also marked the completion of alterations and improvements to the whole of the ground floor. Also in this year, the decision to improve the steward's flat was taken and by Christmas 1976 this phase too had been completed. Three months later, the Committee room and adjoining area had been refurnished and converted to a main committee room with adjacent kitchen and refreshment facilities available as and when required.

By this time, March 1977, 50 years after its opening, the whole of the Club premises had been modernised and furnished throughout to the present high standard of comfort and luxury. The programme of events to celebrate this anniversary is given elsewhere in this booklet and it serves as a fitting climax to this personal account of our examination of the minutes and other relevant documents which have been compiled and collected during this long time. It has not been easy to reduce the records of fifty years into an article of this limited length, but we humbly offer this narrative, hoping it will give you some pleasure as well as a brief insight into this remarkable first 50 years of Club history.

JOHN MAHONEY.

BOB DAVIES.



ALCESTER UNIONIST CLUB. 1977.