

THE SAVAGE CLUB – 1857 TO THE PRESENT DAY

BACKGROUND

The Savage Club is a gentleman's club in London, named after the poet Richard Savage.

The founding meeting of the Club took place on 12 October 1857 at the Crown Tavern, Vinegar Yard, Drury Lane, after a letter by *pro tempore* Honorary Secretary George Augustus Sala was sent to prospective Members. The letter advised that it would be “a meeting of gentlemen connected with literature and the fine arts, and warmly interested in the promotion of Christian knowledge, and the sale of exciseable liquors” with a view to “forming a social society or club”. The inaugural gathering would also decide upon the new association's “suitable designation”.

Many of the original Members were drawn from the ranks of bohemian journalists and writers for The Illustrated London News who considered themselves unlikely to be accepted into the older, arts-related Garrick Club, but, within two decades, the Savage Club itself had become “almost respectable”. The early requirement – “a working man in literature or art, and a good fellow” – was soon broadened to include musicians, with actors, scientists and members of the legal profession joining in later years. We believe that we remain the only London Club to have had four Kings amongst its Membership – Edward VII, George V, Edward VIII and George VI – and last year, we lost our oldest and longest serving Member, HRH the Duke of Edinburgh.

Today, all applicants must be able to demonstrate a strong connection to one of the six categories of membership – Art, Music, Drama, Literature, Science and Law – and will be admitted under that category. It is a quaint tradition that due to perceived earnings differentials, those admitted under Science or Law pay a higher annual subscription than in the traditionally Bohemian categories. The Club currently has around 330 Members, of whom over a third are admitted under Music, many being professional musicians working in the West End.

The Club has always been somewhat itinerant – in its early days, having met just off Drury Lane, it met in a variety of Covent Garden hotels, with the longest periods of occupation being at Adelphi Terrace, Carlton House Terrace, Fitzmaurice Place and, from 1991 until 2021, occupying rooms at 1 Whitehall Place. New premises are sought as our former landlord has seen membership growth and requires additional space, so we vacated the space in December 2021.

27 Great Queen Street (“27”) has been identified as suitable and Heads of Terms have been agreed with the Freeholder. For the Club, it represents a return to its roots in Covent Garden as well as its own front door for the first time since 1963.

THE BUILDING

The intention is to undertake refurbishment work to convert it from its most recent use, as offices, back to being the Georgian townhouse it was built as, in the belief that this will be a suitable and appropriate environment for a private Club. Details are to be provided separately but the broad intention, in addition to undertaking sympathetic but necessary works to underpin the structure of the building, is to remove as many of the modern additions as possible and restore the original

character. We understand that the Freeholder has been provided with advice to the effect that it 27 is not suitable for continued use as office space.

Having been an itinerant lodger for much of the past 60 years, the Club has been forced to keep much of its archival material in storage. As a consequence of having many illustrious Members over the years, we are frequently requested to provide access to our archives to families of former Members as well as academics and other interested parties. We are regularly asked to provide material to exhibitions and retrospectives. It is the intention to house the Archive in a more accessible setting – the additional space means that we can dedicate part of the basement to housing and displaying the material, making it easier for interested parties to access it.

In the same way, the Club's library, consisting mainly of books either about or authored by Members, is currently not able to be fully displayed. The main room on the ground floor will become a library, with table service for those Members who prefer not to ascend the stairs to the first floor bar.

27 has additional space at the rear and the current intention is that this would be made available to Members and guests as a rehearsal space. We are aware that rehearsal space in Central London is something of a rarity and we believe that this would be a valuable amenity.

The first floor will have discreet alterations made to allow it to become a bar. Camaraderie and fellowship are strong elements of the Savage Club ethos and wherever we have made our home, the bar has been central to it. In size terms, what would have been the original Drawing Room will lend itself well to this purpose.

The second floor will be available for use during the daytime as a meeting room for Members who require a Central London venue. It will also be available for hire to Members for small private functions in the evenings and at weekends. The space to the rear, currently a kitchen, will be reconfigured as a pantry so that food prepared off-site can be served. There is no intention for the Club to cook food "in-house".

The third floor rear room will be used as an office for Club staff and for storage of the Club's administration and records. The front room will be fitted out sympathetically with space for Members to work by means of WiFi and to have printing facilities available. We believe this will be a key amenity for Members who still have to come to Central London but who may no longer have physical offices.

STAFFING

In its previous premises, the Club operated with five members of staff, all but one of whom worked part-time but all of whom were required to be on site to fulfil their duties. It is anticipated that one consequence of moving to the larger premises at 27 will be that staff numbers and hours are likely to increase.

The Club is managed on a day-to-day basis by a Bar Steward, who is responsible for the operations of the Club, and an Assistant Secretary, who manages the administration side. Both report into the Honorary Secretary, elected by the Members, who is responsible for the overall strategic management of the Club and for significant operational matters. Oversight is provided by an elected General Committee which is chaired by a Member.

The need for additional supervision of a larger building will mean that the role of Bar Steward will likely transition into more of an Operational role, with the requirement for additional bar staff to cover that aspect of the existing role. There will also be a need for cleaning staff. It is likely therefore that there will be a need for two or three additional members of staff.

OPERATIONS

The Club has a long tradition of House Dinners where Members and their guests dine together approximately 13 times a year. After-dinner entertainment is provided by Members and guests, often musical but can also take the form of readings, magic or monologues. The Club also holds 12 lunches per annum where a guest speaker is invited to address Members on a subject of interest.

Since 1963 and the departure from Carlton House Terrace, catering has always been provided by our landlords meaning that to continue to host such events, we will be looking to venues in close proximity to 27. This will, we hope, benefit local establishments.

When not hosting lunches or House Dinners, the Club's day-to-day operation is that of a private bar, albeit that, as we note above, our intention is to offer additional facilities to Members in 27. A typical lunchtime or evening will see Members congregating in the Bar to chat to other Members or to meet guests, typically moving elsewhere to dine, but perhaps returning afterwards. Given the location of 27, we expect there to be a great deal of mutual benefit to Members and local businesses such as restaurants. Indeed, we would also hope to develop partnerships with local businesses further to broaden and encourage Members' contribution to the local Covent Garden economy.

CRAIG BARRETT

HONORARY SECRETARY, THE SAVAGE CLUB

JANUARY 2022.