

CLUBHOUSE MEMORIES FROM THE 1950s

by Robert Hume

I joined the Club in 1952 as a young cadet and thought it might be of interest to give you a trip down memory lane with a conducted tour of the Clubhouse as I remember it in those far off days. Although the front main structure of the Club has altered little, the usage of the rooms has changed significantly.

On entering by the East Door, known then as the Ladies' Entrance, immediately on your left is what we now call the Commodore's Room, which originally housed our fine Library, known then as the Reading Room. Immediately behind the Reading Room and a short way along the back corridor were the living quarters for the Club Steward. Along the back corridor and continuing on past the West Hallway leads to where our present Dining Room is situated.

On ascending the east stairway you pass what is, and was then, the Starter's Office, and if I close my eyes, I can still see to this day the image of our late member George Mansfield, who was then Sport's Editor for the Belfast News Letter and who assisted with Officer of the Day Duties on five days a week throughout the sailing season (pity we don't have someone like that now!). Sailing then took place on four weeknights plus Saturday afternoons, and before leaving the Club he would phone in the results to the paper's Sport Desk. The Ladies' changing facilities up the remaining few stairs were on the left occupying the space now converted to the Race Office. Opposite on the small landing, now the demesne of the Secretary Manager's office and store, were three small cabins for rental to Members or visiting guests, and beyond the door led into the Gentlemen's dry changing room complete with Member's lockers, which is now the Snooker Room.

Returning downstairs again beside the East Door is the entrance into the Bar Annexe and then through removable wooden shutters to the room we now enjoy as our lounge bar, however in the 1950s we didn't have a bar as such, and this room was the Club's Dining Room. Members wishing to order wines or alcoholic beverages had to do so through a small hatch in the Annexe, which is unseen today from the front, but can be traced from the back corridor.



Proceeding through the door into the main hallway of the Clubhouse with its fine entrance, little has changed. The fine WWI memorial was in place on your left and a matching telephone kiosk under the stairway. The door into the back corridor led directly to the Gents' main changing rooms, which stretched from a small kitchen to the south and west gables of the building with an external door at the back of the Clubhouse. The changing rooms, covering two floors, had their own internal stairs.

Returning to the main hall and ascending the staircase, the room on the right, now called the Upper Deck, was the Secretary's Office. The room on the left, now called the Admiral's Room, was the original Snooker Room – the table was floodlit by its overhead shaded lights and the room itself always kept dark by its wartime blackout blinds.

Outside all boats were parked in the far yard, and the grounds around the Clubhouse were laid in grass for Lawn Tennis and Croquet. The garden steps up the grass bank behind the Clubhouse and path beyond led through tastefully landscaped gardens to two or three hard courts with a wooden pavilion for spectators and a back gate onto Ailsa Road. This land was then on lease to the Club but is now a private house and gardens with access onto Ailsa Road.