

The Southampton & District Motor Cycle Club - History

This long established club was inaugurated in 1944 at a time when World War Two was moving towards its' close.

As the allied armies moved successfully across Europe, a group of Southampton motorcyclists who had served their country locally as a Home Guard reconnaissance platoon began to realise that their period of voluntary military service was also about to end.

Now that the truth can be revealed, their military service had been quite entertaining. After a day's work in the armament factories they were able to ride their own motorcycles, fuelled by a special petrol ration supplied for training purposes by the Army. With this they contrived to cover a whole series of cross country excursions using lanes, byeways and paths to establish a network of local connecting routes little used, but possible of providing direct and short communicating links between the local villages. If there had been time elements and penalties for footing on route these excursions could easily have been taken for observed trials or enduros. It was a small wonder that these part time soldiers decided that the best way to keep themselves together would be to form their own motor cycling club.

So the Southampton & District Club was born.

With their established background it was not long after the cessation of hostilities that the embryo club was actively promoting sporting events.

A solo machine scramble (today's motocross) was held at West Wellow just one month after Armistice. A trial in the same area followed in the autumn of 1945 and on Easter Monday 1946 the first grass track races in the south were organised at Hamble. Later, when reintroduction of petrol rationing curtailed sporting events, attention was switched to the newly introduced RAC/ACU rider training scheme. The club was, in fact, the 10th club to register with this scheme which eventually extended to many hundred of groups country wide. From this eventually developed the present day Ministry of Transport training centres.

For 50 years the club has operated their scheme which today is known as the Flying Start Motor Cycle Training Centre where the embryo riders can learn from government approved instructors the basic skills legally necessary before taking a machine onto the road and can, in fact, take their CBT. Subsequently, training is also available up to the standard required to qualify for a full licence.

Another early club success was the creation of a road racing circuit in 1950 on the redundant wartime airfield at Thruxton.

For 40 years the club was the sole organiser of motor cycle races on this circuit which was the venue for both International and National fixtures as well as the unique Thruxton 9 Hours Race, first held in 1955. This was introduced by the club to provide the British manufacturers with a shop window to demonstrate the quality and performance of their range of sporting models that were in demand, at the time, by world wide markets.

The prestige attached to the event was typified by the introduction of the top of the range Velocette Thruxtonon, a 500cc single, following that company's successful single cylinder class win in the 1964 event.

Throughout a long period of sporting activities the club has developed a wide range of leisure functions which today caters for almost all riders interests.

The sport in all its forms is still an important club activity but the development of the motorcycle as a more acceptable means of transport for both business and pleasure has brought many new interests into the club.

Road riding excursions at weekends embrace many interesting venues and topics and prove very popular with the younger groups whilst those a little older have shown a great interest in the machines they once rode, resulting in a strong following of the Vintage and Veteran cult now firmly established in the club.

The club has never overlooked the need to provide the best possible social facilities for its members and as long ago as 1956 purchased a leasehold tennis club pavilion at Sholing in Southampton for this purpose.

When the lease on these premises expired the demand for a bigger and better replacement was so intense that club leaders soon found themselves recruiting from amongst their members, architects, engineers, builders, carpenters, steel workers, electricians, painters and odd job labourers, who were prepared to give freely of their spare time to build what is probably the finest motorcycle club owned property in southern England. The land on which the Clubhouse is built is leased from Eastleigh Borough Council.

It is here that the club's social activities take place throughout the year. The Flying Start rider training scheme operates there every Sunday and on every Friday evening members and friends meet for a chat, a drink at the licensed bar or tea, coffee and a snack from the kitchen servery.

The club strongly supports the current campaign to promote motorcycle usage as an economical and environmentally friendly form of transport which in addition can contribute substantially to the relief of traffic congestion in the larger conurbations.

To actively pursue these objectives the club has successfully established its own direct representation in both Brussels and Strasbourg with the European Parliament and Commission lobbies.

Internationally it has a voice at the Federation Internationale Motorcycle which boasts 81 member nations and is responsible for all the World Championship motorcycling events.

To benefit the touring rider, the club has a voice in the Road Traffic Safety Working Party of the United Nations Organisation in Geneva.

Neville Goss MBE
President

Jan. 2000

SOUTHAMPTON & DISTRICT MOTORCYCLE CLUB

Headquarters - Past and Present.

A personal account by Wilf Paskins, member since 1945

Introduction.

People join motorcycle clubs because they have a particular interest in, maybe, touring or one branch of the sport or perhaps just being in the company of other motorcyclists. This results in groups being formed of members with the similar interest. A big club promoting events of a diverse nature needs to have the support and participation of the many groups to help in the running of the various events and a strong social side is necessary to maintain a bond between the groups. This can be achieved by the promotion of functions in which all members can participate. Such functions may be social evenings, film shows, quiz nights or whatever and a venue is necessary for these functions as well as for committee meetings and general meetings.

Having recently compiled a record of the Clubs distinguished sporting history which is held in the Clubs files and posted on the Clubs website, I felt that I should attempt to write a similar record of the Clubs social activities. However these are many and various and are not well documented so I decided to confine myself to what the Club has done about providing a venue for social activities and meetings over the years. I also have difficulty in deciding on a title for these words so, as I seemed to be involved in this aspect of the Clubs affairs for so many years, I have chosen to write what might best be described as my memoirs, in particular on the Clubhouse we have today.

1. Camper & Nicholsons Canteen.

For the first year or so, the Club held its Friday evening get-togethers in the canteen at what was then Camper & Nicholsons shipyard in Northam. The venue chose itself for two reasons, one was that Mr. C.A.Nicholson was the officer commanding the Home Guard Recce platoon from which the Club was formed, the other reason was that a shipyard provided many hiding places for motorbikes, necessary lest the police should have visited. You see, petrol was strictly rationed for use on essential journeys only and not all people regarded attending the Club as essential. I remember well standing outside the canteen door seeing a black Ford V8 saloon, of the type used by the police, cruising into the yard causing a bit of a panic until it was seen to be Bob Oakley coming to the meeting in his fathers taxi. Not many police cars were about in those days but it was not unknown for one to get on to the tail of a member on clubnight, if it happened on the way to the meeting it was necessary to abort but if it was on the way home, and in the blackout, it was easy for a motorbike to shake off a car by switching the lights off (lights were no help anyway) and taking a number of turns in quick succession.

2. The Southampton Arms at West End.

When basic petrol rationing was introduced, it was possible to hold the Friday evening meetings at a pub and the Southampton Arms in Moorgreen Road at West End, where Jack Cuff was the licensee, was chosen. Jack was very helpful, a large room was made available for committee meetings and this was also used on Friday evenings but was filled to overflow into the corridor and, in the summer, outdoors. Licensing laws in those days were more

onerous than today, no children allowed, no music or dancing and a strictly applied 10.30 closing time which also meant 'go home'. But the Club pursued a very busy programme of sporting events which required not only members to devote a lot of their time to working parties but also their wives and girlfriends to staff the gates, sell programmes, make tea etc. (In those days ladies were not allowed to officiate at ACU events except in minor roles). To complement these activities a social programme, which members whole families could enjoy at no cost to themselves, was essential. To achieve this the Club used to hire the St. Denys Rowing Club hall for socials and for the AGM.

3. Middle Road, Sholing

In 1956 word was that The Rosoman Tennis Club in Middle Road, Sholing was in financial difficulties and were looking for someone to buy the remaining 14 years of their lease on the land on which their tennis courts and clubroom were situated. They hoped that, if they found the right buyer, they would still be able to continue using the courts. Their asking price was £1000 and, as the Clubs assets totalled a mere £350, you might have thought that would have been the end of our interest but, not so. A committee meeting was held at a pub in East Street, (yes there were some in those days) and most members present offered to pay 15 years subscriptions up front so it was decided to offer the tennis club a 50% deposit with the balance payable over two years. Contact with them suggested that this would be acceptable so, an Extraordinary General Meeting was held, at the premises, on 2nd. December 1956 at which it was learnt that Club President, Alec Bennett, had promised a donation of £100 and the meeting voted to go ahead offering a £600 deposit.

I was closely involved in arranging the purchase and the transfer of the lease, also in making application for the Clubs registration under the licensing acts and some small structural changes to incorporate a bar. At the suggestion of our friends at Esso, I drew up a 'beer engine' which looked like a petrol pump but housed a barrel of Watneys beer and a gas bottle, a clock was incorporated on the front. This was made up for us by Esso and it did look like a scale model but the beer did not come out of the hose, had it done so it could have been quite messy. In 1961, we obtained planning consent for a brick built extension to house a larger, more secure, bar. The brickwork was done for us by the builder who was our next door neighbour, Ted Barfoot, all the other work being done by Club members.



The Clubroom provided all the amenities required with plenty of room for parking, Friday evening meetings, social events and committee meetings. Members families could enjoy the events and the tennis club could continue their activities. This happy state of affairs lasted until 25th. March 1970 when, in spite of rigorous attempts to obtain a renewal of the lease from an intransigent landlords agent, we were obliged to quit. The site and clubhouse remained derelict for a number of years until planning permission to build houses was obtained.

4. The Old Thatched House at Shirley.

A sub-committee was set up to consider all possibilities regarding the provision of a new headquarters. This was made up of Dave Pragnell (the Club Chairman), Peter Philipps, Bernie Venes, Jack Stanfield, Ern. Domoney Bill Parsons and myself; meantime the Old Thatched House at Shirley provided a temporary venue for Friday evenings and the 1971 AGM was held there. It was not a suitable venue for committee meetings as there was no private room available so these were held at the Shirley Hotel. Having owned our own premises for 14 years the sub-committee, feeling that hiring would be a backward move, we started to look for a site on which we could consider building and Southampton City Council was approached. Their response was somewhat surprising, they said they owned numerous pieces of land and suggested that we look around and, if we found a suitable place, they would tell us if they owned it and if they would be prepared to lease it to us. We looked but did not find.

5. Woodside Avenue, Eastleigh

Bill Parsons, being an Eastleigh resident, and having some inside information, suggested that we should try Eastleigh as he had heard there to be a site in Woodside Road (now Woodside Avenue) which was the fourth of a group of sites the council had reserved for community purposes and which had been offered to the Scouts who had turned it down. A tentative enquiry was made which gave us some encouragement and meetings with officials were held resulting in a firm offer being made. As the Club is not a corporate body, it was necessary to appoint three trustees, Dave Pragnell, Len Harfield and myself were appointed and, after approval by the Club and the council's legal department, we signed a lease on the land giving us possession on 1st. January 1971. While the negotiations were taking place the sub-committee were considering what we might build. I proposed a building 60ft. long x 30 ft. wide with block walls, steel framework, asbestos roof and a concrete floor which I estimated would cost in the region of £4,000 to £5,000. That the total assets of the Club at the end of 1970 was only £4,174, did not deter the committee nor apparently did the enormity of the proposal. As a Chartered Engineer I was however under no illusions and I was confident that it could be done because, as a director of a company engaged in the construction industry, I was well placed to play a major role.

Robinsons of Winchester was the company and their major activity was to design and build commercial greenhouses with associated heating systems and mechanical services. Contracts often included for the provision of ancillary buildings and negotiations with planning and building regulation authorities were common. As Works and Technical Director I was in charge of all design, purchasing and manufacturing operations.

The day we took possession of the site, a little ceremony took place. The land had been growing brussels sprouts (I don't know who they belonged to) so we carefully measured between them to where the bar would be, set up a plank on two oil drums, produced a bottle of Scotch and some glasses and drank a toast to the success of the venture.

I was able to draw up the plans and to submit the planning application which was granted subject to the required building regulations approval which primarily dealt with drainage and structural strength which I was also able to satisfy. Working parties were then convened whose first job was to clear the site, set it out and to dig a trench out to the road for the water

supply. Meantime I was able to open credit accounts (and we really needed credit) with material suppliers. It was convenient that I was Club Treasurer at the time so I was able to juggle payments between the requirement to pay suppliers invoices and the many other liabilities of the Club arising from its busy sporting programme.

A lot of hard work by a good few members for a few weeks saw the site levelled and concrete foundations laid which incorporated pocket bases to accept the steel stanchions and made provision for foul water drainage pipes. Then the steelwork had to be manufactured from materials supplied at cost by Robinsons. I had already designed the steelwork so all that was necessary was to convene a working party at the factory one Sunday and, with the aid of a Robinson welder and a sawman who were persuaded to help, all the stanchions, roof trusses and roof purlins were manufactured in the one day, loaded on to a Robinsons lorry and despatched to site where they were painted

We were required by the Council to construct a sewer manhole for the common usage of the four properties (Red Cross, ATC, Girl Guides and ourselves) and connect this to the main sewer in Woodside Road. More hard graft digging by members, carefully laying the pipes to the required fall on pea gravel, jointing the pipes and then, after the building inspectors inspection and approval, backfilling the trenches and making good the surface.

Erection of the steelwork was not a job for amateurs, but one of Robinsons subcontract teams was pleased to help, and it went up in a day securely tied until the stanchions were concreted into the pockets in the foundations. Blocks to damp proof course level were laid then we had to scavenge for hardcore material for infill. This seemed to be hard to come by and under the bar store lies old concrete lumps from the elephant house that used to be on Southampton Common. Controversially quite a lot of broken glass (from Robinsons of course) also went into the infill. The oversite was then concreted.

Then came the first hiccup, the hoped for bricklayer did not materialise so I had to put in another Robinsons subcontractor who agreed a low price as long as he was able to fit in when it was convenient to him. Progress up till this time had been pretty rapid and, quite naturally, enthusiasm started to flag because little could be done until the walls were built. Materials and equipment left unattended overnight were a worry but, surprisingly we suffered no losses. Fortunately, living in West End and working in Winchester, I was able to make frequent visits and often did so three times a day, taking my 'sandwiches' with me at lunchtime.

Eventually the walls got built and it was time for the asbestos-cement roof, again not a job for the amateur, so another Robinson team was installed and the roof was covered in a couple of days. Club working parties then worked with renewed vigour to make the building secure so that internal work could commence. Windows and doors were fitted and made lockable, it so happened that Robinsons was, at this time, building a new office block and had no need for the pair of hardwood doors that had graced their entrance foyer up till then - very convenient. More hard work was necessary to dig soakaways for rainwater disposal then guttering and downpipes were fitted.

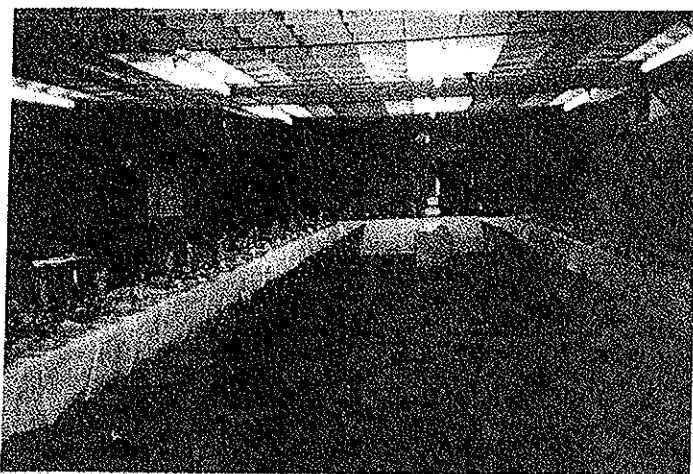
With what was now a secure building the many internal works could commence, installing toilets and washbasins, connecting to the foul drainage system and the plumbing; fitting out the kitchen and installing the hot water tank; installing the electrics, consumer units, power points and lighting system; fitting out the bar including the installation of the 'Rollalong'

shutters and a steel door to the bar store to provide the necessary security. We brought in some experts (Flooring & Fencing of Chandlers Ford) to lay the floor screed and vinyl tiles as we had neither the equipment nor the expertise to do this ourselves.

Next was the heating system, the various alternatives were considered and an oil fired warm air ducted system was chosen for two reasons, firstly because it was considered the best way to provide 'instant' heat throughout the building, secondly because Robinsons made such heaters, oil tanks and ducting. A traded-in heater was acquired and completely rebuilt with a special combustion can and heat exchanger and the ductwork which I was able to engineer was made up and fitted by Robinsons sheet metal shop manager. This was all suspended, above the ceiling, from the steel structure. A little more building work was required to house the heater itself and to provide the support and regulation bund wall for the oil tank.

The ceiling presented a problem as it threatened to cost more money than we could afford bearing in mind that we needed to provide tables and chairs, water heaters and other fittings. This was solved by rashing-up sheets of plywood in Robinsons woodshop to form the egg-box arrangement we still have today. It is now painted white but was initially silver as this was one of only two colours of paint used in Robinsons paint shop. The cover material was originally cheap white polyethylene film. Tables were purchased from the firm who supplied Watneys, the brewer and chairs, at a bargain price, from Rickman Engineering (yes, the same manufacturer as the Mettise motorcycles) where Neville Goss was production manager. Then attention was directed to cleaning up the outside, laying and rolling hoggin to form the car park and laying two concrete strips for motorcycle parking. We also built a fence along the allotment side which we were required by the council to do.

The project took nine months to get to the stage when it could be used and the official opening, to which dignitaries from the world of motorcycle sport and others were invited, took place in January 1972. Total cost came out at £4,030 complete with the basic furniture and fittings and the Club still had £1300 in the bank as a result of the sporting events held in the year.



The Committee Room and Cloakroom were added in 1975 at a cost of £567.

Later the access road and car park were improved by laying a few loads of truck mixed concrete at a cost of £1,400.

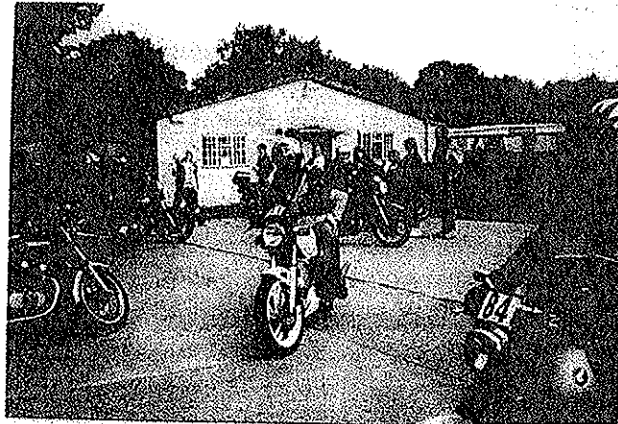
The Games Room extension was added in 1981 at a cost of £1,800 and the wood block floor and carpet tiles cost £700.

Inside the Clubroom, 'dressed' for a formal occasion

I don't quite know why I have written my account of the building of the Clubhouse in the way that I have. I don't think my motives were egotistical, I suppose I just felt that an account of

some sort had to be written and that I had to put on record something that showed recognition of the contribution made by Robinsons of Winchester Ltd. in allowing me to use their good offices and facilities for the benefit of the Club. Without this contribution, the Clubhouse as we know it today, would not have been built. No doubt we would have put up a building of some sort but I don't think it would have been of comparable quality,

My regret in writing the account is that my memory does not allow me to recall the names of the many members who devoted so much of their time and effort towards the building of the Clubhouse and I have deliberately not mentioned many names in my narrative. I have chosen instead to list the names of those that I do remember and, to the best of my recollection, what they did. I apologise to those I have not included and, if anybody reading this has a better memory than I and wishes to add, or change, what I have written, I would have no objection. Apart from the bar and the fitting of the heating installation and ducting, I didn't do much of the work myself but, as the Architect, Engineer, Quantity Surveyor, Clerk of the Works and Purchasing Officer, I think I can claim to having done most of the worrying.



A Club run leaving the Clubhouse

Special thanks are due to the wives and families of those members who devoted so much of their time to the Clubhouse, particularly as many of them were also involved in the promotion of the four road race meetings we ran at Thruxton, the two scrambles and two trials the Club ran in the same year. As Club Treasurer I was involved in all six of the speed events and, taken together with the building, my family saw little of me that year.

The building of the clubhouse realised the ambition to provide a suitable base from which the Club could pursue the promotion of its sporting activities and, I am sure that those who contributed will share my satisfaction to see that, although the Clubs motorcycling activities have changed, the Clubhouse is perhaps even more important to the Club today than it was when it was built. Personally I am gratified to see that it is being used to such good effect.

List of some of the members who devoted their time and effort to building the Clubhouse.

Dave Pragnell.....Transport and various jobs
Stan Spanner.....Digging, mixing concrete etc.
Jack Pinckney.....Digging, forming foundations, concreting etc.
Bob Kelly.....All electrical installation including supply
Jack Stanfield.....Various jobs, and assisted Bob Kelly
Peter Philipps..... Filming progress and plumbing etc.
Frank Snell.....Many jobs, and assisted Peter Philipps
Bernie Venes.....Cheerleader, motivator and worker
Bob Payton.....Sanitary equipment and many other jobs.
Ernie Domoney.....Various jobs.
Don Light.....Digging, Carpentry etc.
Bill Parsons.....Assisted everybody including bricklayer, decorating etc.
Mick and Rose Chapman.....Mixing concrete and various other jobs.
Bob and Chuck Smith..... Various jobs.
Eric Beach..... Various jobs
Frank Page.....Digging etc.
Peter Brown..... Various
Bill Kinane..... Foundations and oversite concrete
Chris Oliver..... Concrete etc.
George Herbert..... Foundations, trenches etc.
Freddie Beauchamp
Graham Hallett

and others.

This kitchen was refurbished
in July 1983, to conform
to local health authority
regulations. new licence Sept
1983

Gordon Jacobs did the
Plastering

Frank Snell the hot water
system

Bill Parsons the wood work
and electric's

The Clubhouse underwent major refurbishment at the end of October 2004.

Trevor Mathieson, Stuart Grattan and Tony Kenward took a week off work, camped in mobile homes outside the Clubhouse for 7 days, and with the help of several other Club members, undertook the mammoth challenge of completely refurbishing the Clubhouse
Sincere thanks must be given to:

Trevor Mathieson and Stuart Grattan who got stuck into everything

Tony Kenward who was responsible for the painting and decorating & purchasing most of the materials.

Kevin Lewis who was general assistant to everybody

Jason Hall who replaced all the electrics with assistance from Steve

Brian Rawlings who installed all the plumbing

Frank Snell who was present every day to help and advise where needed

Jim Dyson who assisted Stuart every evening with every odd job

Barry Rawlings who bricked up every open hole

Brian Boden for helping with general jobs and painting over a couple of days

Jacky Kenward who gave the Clubhouse that final 'women's touch'.

Jacky Kenward, Irene Mathieson, and Carol Crutchfield who took it in turns to keep the workmen fed and watered.