

'BANFF TOWN AND COUNTY CLUB: THE STORY OF ITS FIRST 100 YEARS'  
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The preservation of historical, cultural and recreational institutions in the North-east of Scotland has become a matter of grave and urgent concern to increasing numbers as the dawning of a new century, a mere two decades away, draws ever close. A general awareness of the need to conserve all that is good of the past has always existed but substantive action on a significant scale has been limited and only in the post-World War Two era has the pace been stepped up.

The County of Banff, rich in cherished traditions, has been in the vanguard of the conservation movement and has accomplished much in ensuring the country's heritage remains preserved for posterity. The post-war birth of such dedicated organisations as Banff Preservation Society and the Banffshire Coastal Conservation Society is adequate testimony to the importance to which Banffshire people attach to protecting, preserving and, where possible, restoring its heritage.

The task in Banffshire is made all the more difficult because depopulation, one of the 20th century curses of the county, has decimated the countryside and made deep inroads on most communities. This gradual but insidious process, corroding life in towns and villages and upsetting the social structure, has led to the disappearance of many old established cultural and recreational institutions which have been swept away in the general exodus and are now consigned to the mists of memory.

In the final quarter of this century bureaucracy combined with the Welfare State have stepped into the arena to represent yet another threat to the continuing individuality, if not survival, of local clubs and societies. They provide the soft cushion for the individual so that total reliance on government, both local and national, to supply the means to cater for his expanding leisure time has become almost, if not wholly, the accepted practice.

Yet despite these vicissitudes Banff Town and County Club, one of the county's senior institutions, remains a sturdy survivor, retaining its independence against all the odds. For 100 years now it has fulfilled a unique role in the social life of its members and, arguably, in the community at large.

Throughout its chequered history the Club in its own way has mirrored life in Banff during the past 100 years. In its early days the membership was select, drawn from

what was then the influential faction of the community.

Many of these self-same people were at the helm in the local business world, several were leaders in their profession and not a few dictated municipal affairs in the county's principal seat of administration.

They were the well-to-do and enjoyed a standard of life that was not the lot of those born on the other side of the track in a Banff that, almost un-noticed, was slowly heading for decline as a commercial and trading centre on the approach to the 20th century. The aftermath of two world wars saw a levelling up in the small town social strata and the Royal Burgh duly fell into line with prevailing trends. The days of fore-lock touching were over!

Almost throughout the ten decades of its existence the Club headquarters have been at Boyndie House, a gracious historic building of outstanding architectural merit, steeped in an atmosphere of old Banff and with its own individual ambience. Entering its portals and, turning a Nelson eye to visual evidence of modern times, one senses a pervading air of days gone by.

Nevertheless this tranquil setting houses a vibrant institution, where town and gown meet and friendly relaxed discourse is the order of the day. Tempers rarely flare, good conversation is appreciated and while religious and current political controversy are not exactly taboo, they seldom assume a dominating theme. It is a sanctuary for the retired where in comfortable surroundings they can browse through the numerous publications at their disposal and reminisce of days that are no more. Recreational facilities are in the precincts, too, for the more energetic to pursue favourite pastimes and escape from the pressures of work-a-day life whether it be over a leisurely game of bowls, at the billiard table or in the cardroom.

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No grand Victorian melodrama heralded its founding. Opposition and criticism there might have been, but if there were they must have been muted. Controversy, later to be occasionally hinted at in a largely conservative community, was curiously absent. Instead, a need having been publicly expressed, steps were taken to fulfil it.

In the vanguard were the real founding fathers of the Club, the professional and business community, the solicitors, bankers, teachers and merchants, who dominated the social order in Banff. For their venture they received the tacit support of certain "noblemen and gentlemen" in the county, the so-called upper echelons of polite society.

The Banff of 1881, the year the Club was born, was a flourishing market town with an extensive import-export trade through a busy little harbour. The population numbered 4,255, comprising 1085 families, and they lived in 816 houses. The home-based fleet consisted of 38 large and seven small boats, ranging from 26 to 526 tons.

Three firms carried on ship and boat-building and other industries included rope and sail-making, weaving, brewing, printing and foundry-work. It was an important centre of public administration, education and the law with no fewer than eight differing religious establishments. Gas-lit Low Street and High Street, the principal thoroughfares, were its business and commercial heart. Located in this neighbourhood were merchants representing a wide variety of trades, ranging through blacksmiths, bell-hangers and

gas-fitters, watchmakers, seedsmen and florists, half-a-dozen butchers, tea, wine and spirit merchants, the latter also dispensing guns, gunpowder, sports ammunition and vermin traps! Hotels and inns offered their own stabling and Banff Central Savings Bank provided the finance.

The town's literary society in 1881 could muster 5,000 volumes, four of which could be borrowed at a time for two shillings per quarter. The golfing fraternity fore-gathered on the testing Banff Links course, bowlers were scouring the town for their first green site, and the Banffshire Horticultural Association were preparing for their 41st annual show. The town boasted a Bible Society, Temperance Society, Musical Association (conductor: Herr J. Hoffman), a Mutual Improvement Society and a Deposit and Friendly Society. A company of the Banffshire Rifle Volunteers and the 2nd Banffshire Artillery Volunteers were prepared to defend the town and district.

Civic head at the time was Provost William Coutts, a solicitor, with the offices of town clerk and burgh chamberlain occupied, respectively, by Mr John Allan and Mr James Smith. Burgh prosecutor was Mr Francis George. A dozen solicitors practised at the bar and were also involved in the administration of the school board, harbour trustees and Police Commissioners.

On the outskirts of Banff in stately Duff House the illustrious Fife family entertained British and foreign Royalty, the rich and the famous, while the ordinary townspeople enjoyed soirees, penny readings and the occasional travelling theatre show. The recent advent of the railway was rapidly making its impact, and the powers-that-be at Westminster were laboriously debating a proposed extension of the network to link the scattered communities along the Banffshire coast.

The county of Banff at the time had a population of 62,731 and one-third of the countryside was devoted to arable farming. Fishing was prosecuted from 13 "stations". The arrival of the train was eagerly awaited in many and at the same time there was a clamour for what had become an accepted necessity: piped water supplies. The year 1881 was also one of tragedy cause by the severity of the weather which treated Banff to six degrees of June frost and grimly accounted for 32 North-east ships in a cruel March storm.

Elsewhere in the outside world in 1881 Aberdeen City bailed to control an epidemic, Vienna lost 580 residents in a calamitous theatre fire and Liverpool almost lost its Town Hall at the hands of two Irishmen who attempted to blow it up.

In the midst of it all Banff Town and County Club came into existence.

## ***The Founding***

A crucial omission in the records constitutes a frustrating obstacle to determining the exact origins of Banff Town and County Club and draws a veil over the initial steps that led to its foundation. The facts cannot be established with the desired degree of accuracy but the conception of one of Banff's oldest institutions apparently stemmed from moves early in 1881 to resuscitate in the town a defunct public reading room that had once flourished in association with the town's literary society.

The first informal move came at a meeting of supporters of the reading room's re-

opening held in the Council Chambers at Banff early in the year at the height of a severe winter storm. A burgh magistrate, Bailie Francis Sellar, presided and it appears there was a good attendance. However, even before this exploratory meeting an investigation into probable costs had been carried out and a statement of estimated income and expenditure was submitted to the gathering.

Presumably it proved acceptable because all present decided to join the proposed reading room. A subscription of ten shillings per annum was agreed and on the suggestion of Mr George W. Murray, proprietor of Banff Foundry, a committee was appointed to make the necessary arrangements for recruiting members.

In the weeks that followed this (for the Club) historic meeting the movement gained momentum and a decision was taken to depart from the original concept of merely establishing a reading room. A men's club with reading room was now envisaged and there must have been intensive activity among the promoters of the venture for in a remarkably short time they recruited to their ranks several distinguished figures in the county, inspected a suggested club-room at No. 6 South Castle Street, Banff, and agreed on categories of membership along with appropriate fees.

On April 26, 1881, the local press recorded: "We are glad to learn that there is every prospect of the proposal to form a club and reading rooms for the town and county of Banff proving successful. The subject has been brought under the notice of the noblemen and gentlemen of the county, several of whom have already responded with an intimation they will support the institution." Among those named were the Earl of Fife, the Earl of Seafield, Mr M. E. Grant Duff, M.P. for the Elgin Burghs (which included Banff), The Hon. George Skene Duff, Mr R. W. Duff, M.P. for the county of Banff, and others who had indicated their intention of becoming life members.

The press account continued: "For the purposes of the club it is intended to lease commodious premises in Castle Street admirably adapted for the purpose. The suite of apartments will include newsroom, billiard room, card room, smoking room and retiring premises." There were also references to a life membership subscription of £20; an entry fee for ordinary members of £5 with an annual subscription of ten shillings; and a third category of membership embracing annual members paying one guinea yearly. For those who preferred to use only the newsroom a subscription of a half-guinea annually was proposed.

The writer of the press report concluded: "The institution is much needed and it is gratifying to the promoters to find that they are meeting with a hearty response from those to whom they applied to become members both in the town and county."

Just one week later came the announcement that the support promised would ensure success and the promoters had provisionally leased the South Castle Street premises for five years. More "noblemen and gentlemen" had declared they would become life members, including the Duke of Richmond and Gordon, Lord Lieutenant of Banffshire, Mr Thomas Gordon-Duff, of Park, convener of the county, and Mr John P. Gordon, junr., of Cairnfield. Ordinary members by then numbered 25 and applications were invited but it was being explained in the community that after a constitution had been adopted admission to the new Club would be only by ballot.

The actual founding of the Club dates from June 11, 1881, when the inaugural meeting of promoters and members was held in the Council Chambers. Those present that

particular Saturday afternoon, the same day that tragedy overtook a Whitehills vessel which sank off Blackpots with its crew of four, numbered 18: George W. Murray, Colleonard; John Allan, solicitor; James Findlater, Balvenie; Alex Duncan, bank agent; James Forbes, solicitor; Alex Greig, Sandlaw; Andrew L. Nicol, Journal Office; Charles Raeburn, seedsman; George A. Duncan, merchant; William Munro, posimaster; Clement W. R. Gordon, solicitor; John Graham, merchant; William Auld, bank agent; George Gumming, writer; Rev. Aeneas Chisholm, parish priest; Garden M. Hossack, solicitor; James Morrison, solicitor; Channing Esdaile, Eden House.

The meeting, presided over by Mr Murray, was told that 12 "noblemen and gentlemen" had agreed to become life members. In addition there were 29 ordinary members and a further 29 potential yearly members. This, it was agreed, was sufficient to warrant the club's constitution. The members decided, as originally proposed, that the name of the club should be the "Banff Town and County Club and Newsroom" and that an association should be formed under the Companies Act and Licence of the Board of Trade in terms of Section 23 of the Companies Act of 1867.

They further resolved there should be a president, vice-president and five members of Council to be elected annually, that the Council should manage the affairs of the Club and that there should be a secretary and treasurer. They agreed the election of future members should be by ballot of the whole membership and that three (later five) black balls should exclude a candidate for membership. They also ruled that nine members had to be present for a membership ballot, with voting confined to between 7 p.m. and 9 p.m.

For conducting the business of the Club they allocated three votes each to life members, two votes to ordinary members and one vote to yearly members. At this memorable meeting a committee was appointed, with the Rev. Mr Chisholm as convener, to frame rules for the management of the Club and draw up Articles of Association. The committee was also authorised to arrange the necessary alterations to the South Castle Street premises - harling, external and interior decoration - and buy furnishings.

## ***The Founders***

The list of original members as recorded in the Club's first minute book which dates from the historic June 11 meeting is as follows:

Life Members - His Grace the Duke of Richmond and Gordon, K.G., Gordon Castle; Rt. Hon. Earl of Fife, K.T., Duff House; Rt. Hon. Earl of Seafield, Cullen House; Rt. Hon. M. E. Grant Duff, M.P.; Hon. George Skene Duff, Montcoffer House; R. W. Duff, M.P., of Fettereso; Archibald Hay Duff, Youngest, of Drummuir; John Harvey, of Carnousie; John P. Gordon, of Cairnfield James Barclay, of Buchromb; Sir R. J. Abercromby, Bt., of Forglan.

Ordinary Members - William Auld, bank agent; Robert Duncan, merchant; G. W. Murray, engineer; John Allan, solicitor; James Morrison, solicitor; Aeneas Chisholm, clergyman; Alexander Duncan, bank agent; A. O. Morrison, bank agent; Channing Esdaile, Eden House; Francis George, solicitor; John Graham, merchant; George A. Duncan, merchant; Clement W. R. Gordon, solicitor; R. W. Souter, solicitor; W.

Graham, brewer; William Coutts, solicitor; George Gumming, county collector; Garden M. Hossack, solicitor; A. O. Stevenson, Blairshinnoch; James Simpson, Colleonard House; G. Pirie, Banff; Alexander Ramsay, St. Leonard's; Andrew L. Nicol, North Castle Street; Alexander Mair, solicitor, Buckie; James Forbes, solicitor; A. Greig, Sandlaw; John W. Courtenay, farmer, Slackadale; James Simpson, junr.; W. G. Scott Moncrieff; Alexander Booth.

Annual Members - T. G. Rose Innes, of Netherdale; George Ironside, Alexander Rae, junr., W. Munro, postmaster, James Watt, bank agent, John Coutts, Charles Raeburn, seedsman; Alexander Simpson, junr., John W. Simpson, Robert Morrison, draper, James Spence, J. Hoffman, William Craig, John Eyval; John Barclay, James Grant, George Mowat, John Robson, James Smith; Rev. Mr Bruce, William Davidson, John Yeats, George Ellis, all Banff; John M. Find-later, Balvenie; C. Thurburn, Keith.

By the time the Club's premises were officially opened the number of annual members had increased to 33 and there were 45 subscribers to the newsroom. There was also an additional life member - Mr Alexander Asher who had succeeded Mr Grant Duff as M.P. from the Elgin Burghs, the latter becoming Governor of Madras.

The next important step in the Club's early days followed in August of the same year when the members, with Mr Garden Hossack presiding, met in the Council Chambers to consider the committee's draft proposed Memorandum and Articles of Association, along with draft proposed bye-laws. After various amendments were put these were adopted and the meeting proceeded to appoint the Club's first office-bearers.

Mr Thomas Gordon-Duff, of Park, who had become convener of Banffshire in April of that year, was appointed the first president, with Provost William Coutts, Banff, as vice-president. No significance can be attached to the fact that neither were actually present at the meeting. Mr James Morrison, solicitor, and Mr Alex Duncan, bank agent, were appointed respectively, the first secretary and treasurer, and the first Council comprised the Rev. Mr Chisholm and Messrs. William Auld, John Allan, Francis George and George W. Murray. The members had selected no fewer than four legal men and two financiers among their office-bearers and Council!

The newly-appointed secretary, Mr Morrison, was duly instructed to seek approval of the draft Memorandum and Articles of Association from the Secretary of State and "to have the company duly registered as a limited liability company". It was not until January 17 of the following year, more than three months after the official opening of the Club's premises, that the Board of Trade formally granted a licence directing the Banff Town and County Club and Newsroom "to be registered with limited liability", without the addition of the word "Limited" to the name. The official Certificate of Incorporation under the Companies Acts 1862-1880 followed almost immediately.

The Memorandum of Association states that the objects for which the Club is established are:

- (a) the provision and maintenance of a Club and Newsroom at Banff for the social intercourse, recreation and intellectual improvement of the Members of the Club;  
and
- (b) the doing of all such other things as are incidental or conducive to the furtherance and attainment of the above objects.

The vital condition under which the licence is granted by the Board of Trade to the Club reads:

"The income and property of the Club, from whatever source derived, shall be applied solely towards the promotion and furtherance of the objects of the Club as set forth in this Memorandum of Association, and no part thereof shall be paid or transferred, directly or indirectly, by way of dividend, bonus or otherwise howsoever by way of profit to the Members of the Club. Provided that nothing herein shall prevent the payment in good faith of remuneration to any Officer or Servant of the Club, or to any Member of the Club or other person in return for any services actually rendered to the Club, or prevent the borrowing of money by the Club from any Member thereof under any power of borrowing, at any rate of interest not exceeding £5 per centum per annum."

The Memorandum of Association adds that if any member pays or receives any dividend, bonus, or other profit, in contravention of the foregoing, "his liability shall be unlimited".

Under the terms every member undertakes to contribute to the assets of the Club in the event of it being wound up during the time he is a member, or within one year afterwards ... "for payment of debts and liabilities of the Club contracted before the time he ceased to be a member, and of the costs, charges, and expenses of winding up the same, and for the adjustment of the rights of the contributors amongst themselves such amount as may be required, not exceeding £1 ... "

The Memorandum of Association lays down that any property remaining after the winding up or dissolution of the Club will not be paid to or distributed among the members. It will be given or transferred to some other institution(s) with objects similar to the Club to be determined by the members themselves at or before the time of dissolution. If for some reason or other this is not carried out then the matter would be decided by the Courts.

The seven subscribers who signed as "desirous of being formed into an Association" were all business and professional men resident in Banff - Robert Duncan, merchant, 27 Carmelite Street; John Allan, solicitor, 2 Back Path; George Cumming, county collector, High Shore; R. W. Soutar, solicitor, 5 High Shore; John Graham, merchant, 4 Castle Street; George A. Duncan, merchant, 27 Carmelite Street; and James Morrison, solicitor, 2 High Shore.

The original constitution limited membership to 100 in three categories - life, ordinary, annual. It fixed the life membership subscription at a once-only payment of £20. For ordinary members there was a £5 entrance fee with an annual subscription of ten shillings and sixpence, and annual members had a yearly subscription of one guinea.

On voting the constitution confirmed the original proposition that, except in balloting, every annual member was entitled to one vote, every ordinary member had two votes and every life member three. Voting by proxy was allowed and there was no mention of the chairman having a second, or casting, vote. According to the rules and bye-laws application forms for membership had to be displayed six days before the election date in the news, billiard and card rooms, and apparently there had been second thoughts on the number of black balls that counted; for five, not three as originally envisaged, excluded a potential member.

These initial rules and bye-laws provided for the admission of visitors to the premises but stipulated geographical boundaries! For example, every member was permitted to have "the occasional company of a friend" in the Club, provided his guest was not a resident of the Parliamentary Burgh of Banff. A member also had the privilege of introducing for one month "a stranger not resident in Banffshire or in the portion of Aberdeenshire within 20 miles of Banff". His name had to be entered in a special visitors' book. However, the "stranger" could be introduced once only in six months, although his month's temporary membership could be extended by the Council up to 12 months on his pre-paying a fee at the rate of ten shillings per quarter. And that entitled him also to the use of the card room!

It was decreed that the Club would open every day, except Sunday, at 8 a.m., closing at 12.30, except on Saturdays when the premises would shut at 11.30 p.m. Smokers were confined to a room reserved specially for them although smoking was allowed in the billiard room. A breach of this particular rule cost the culprit a one shilling fine. As for consuming alcohol on the premises, Rule No. 14 made it abundantly clear that no "spirituous liquors" could be consumed in any part, although within a few years soft drinks and cigars were on sale within the Clubrooms.

The newsroom was open to non-members, admitted as subscribers at ten shillings and sixpence annually, payable in advance. Its administration became the responsibility of a committee of five Club members and four subscribers. The rules governing the use of the newsroom remain largely the same as apply today. Even the penalties for removing newspapers, periodicals and publications are unchanged after a century, namely one shilling (5p) for a first offence and two shillings (10p) for every subsequent offence. The newsroom committee had powers to permit "strangers" to use the room for a period of up to a year. Smoking in it was confined to a special corner.

The billiard room was administered under a set of 12 rules, with billiards always taking precedence over pool or pyramid pool. The original charges were: 50 points, fourpence if finished within a half-hour and sixpence if over a half-hour; 100 points, eight pence, and so on in proportion. The charge for pool or pyramid pool was threepence each for two players, and twopence each when three or more players took part. A member using the table on his own paid threepence per quarter-hour.

A system of fines operated on a descending scale for damaging the billiard table cloth ranging from one guinea for the first cut to five shillings for the fourth and every subsequent cut. There were fines also for smoking a cigar or uncovered pipe over the table, and a shilling fine was imposed for using another member's cue (but only if the owner insisted on the penalty).

The duties of the marker (Club steward-keeper) included cleaning the billiard table, ensuring cues were maintained in good condition and setting and lighting fires before 12 noon daily. He was required to be in attendance continuously from 11 a.m. to 12.30 a.m., apart from meal times, but if at 11 p.m. the table was not in use then he was allowed to leave. He also had to obtain special permission to leave the games room during play.

Rules for the card room were brief. Players had to pay twopence each per hour for the use of cards and no game was permitted above threepence per point.



The original rule-book contained two further general clauses. The first insisted that any member damaging or destroying Club property, other than the billiard table cloth, was liable immediately to pay the value as fixed by the Council. The second permitted the secretary or any two of the committee to grant occasional leave of absence to any of the Club's servants, but without such permission "they are not to absent themselves from the rooms on any pretence whatever".

However, before all the rules and regulations could come into operation the Club members had to install themselves in their newly-leased Clubrooms at No. 6 South Castle Street.

### ***Early Days***

Banff Town and County Club's first premises at No. 6 South Castle Street were leased in 1881 at £19 10/- per annum for live years from Mr Alexander Booth, a land surveyor, who was also one of the original members. The property formed part of extensive buildings that at one time had been occupied by a wealthy family of merchants and ship-owners, the Chalmers of Cluny, one of whom endowed Banff's Chalmers Hospital.

The buildings comprised shops, offices and houses and the Chalmers family, who traded well into the 19th century, first occupied them as early as 1782. In 1826 the firm of James Chalmers and Company owned the property and ten years later the business passed into the ownership of Mr William Strachan, then the sole surviving partner of the company. In 1870 the property came into the hands of a descendant, Mrs Mary Wood or Booth, wife of Alexander Booth, of Tarves.

The first recorded meeting of Club members in their own premises took place on September 7, 1881, when the furnishing committee considered sealed tenders, along with patterns, and accepted an offer from James Smith, cabinet-maker (a Club member) for £49 19/5 for the supply of - 12 birch chairs in hair cloth at 14/6 each; linoleum at 2/11 per yard; carpeting for the card room at 3/11 per yard; carpeting for the "dressing room" at 1/10½ per yard. Also included were an extra 12 Windsor chairs at 6/3 each, apparently in place of two wooden forms! In insisting on maximum comfort the founder members were setting a splendid example zealously followed by their successors! Mr Smith was also asked to supply a rug costing one guinea for the card room and, for 12/6 extra, to adapt a large settee in circular style to fit a recess in the billiard room.

About the same time as the furnishing committee was painstakingly choosing the chairs and carpets, the newsroom subscribers were meeting to nominate their four to act as a committee along with Club representatives in managing the newsroom. They selected George Shearer, clothier; John Wilson, rector of Banff Academy; Bailie Francis Sellar and William Robson. The joint committee briskly got down to business, debating their choice of newspapers and periodicals before producing a list of seven daily newspapers, six weekly newspapers and six monthly periodicals.

Students of the media will be interested in the titles. The "dailies" chosen were: The Times, The Standard, Pall Mall Gazette, Scotsman, Glasgow News, Aberdeen Free Press, Aberdeen Journal; the "weeklies" - Spectator, Banffshire Journal, Illustrated

London News, Graphic, Punch, Judy; the "monthlies" - Blackwood Magazine, Chambers Journal, Contemporary Review, The Nineteenth Century, Cornhill Magazine, The Argosy.

Although frequent meetings were now taking place within the clubrooms it was not until Friday, September 30, 1881, that a formal opening ceremony marked the inauguration of the Club at No. 6 South Castle Street. The premises, suitably adapted, were on two floors, the lower accommodating games room for cards and billiards, and a lavatory. The first floor comprised a reading room, fitted out with reading desks, and a smoke room.

The Club's first keeper, appointed some weeks following the official opening, was Mr Alexander Munro, whose weekly wage of seven shillings and sixpence was supplemented by a free house, fire and light.

The official opening was performed by the Club's president, Mr Thomas Gordon-Duff, of Park, convener of Banffshire. It was an afternoon event and over 50 members assembled in the reading room to hear him preface his address by commenting that the Duke of Richmond and Gordon, Lord Lieutenant and a life member of the Club, was in Banff that very day.

"I am sorry that someone has not persuaded him to come here and open these rooms," Mr Gordon-Duff told the company. "I am afraid it is too late now and, as I have been asked to do it, it has occurred to me that it is rather a difficult thing to know what I should say as to the advantages to be derived from this Club for these are well understood. But I am afraid it has its disadvantages, as some people call them, quite as much also. Man is a gregarious animal, I believe, and we also know on good authority that it is not good for man to live alone."

Amid applause he commented, "Everyone cannot be in the desirable position of not being obliged to live alone, and it is to unfortunates like these that the Club will be of the greatest benefit and use."

The president then observed, "Those who are acquainted with India know that the elephant, when he lives in solitude, becomes what is called a 'rogue', and in consequence doubly dangerous. Well, perhaps, I won't say that the men of Banff might become rogues exactly in proportion as they live in solitude but it is not good for them to have too much of their own society and not quite enough of other people's. Certainly this Club will enable men to escape from their own society and mix with their fellows in a pleasant way, and have a little wholesome friction with each other."

He raised a solitary laugh (or so it is recorded) when he referred to the particularly strong condemnation of clubs by women. But, prophetically as events have turned out, he continued, "I can only say the ladies of Banff - unfortunately there are none here - if they would make an agitation (it is the fashion to agitate these days) will get admission to the Club, too, and thus be able to look after the men." Amid the laughter this sally provoked, he pointed out that such a situation was within the bounds of possibility "for there are many clubs and reading rooms to which ladies are admitted. I understand the hours of closing these rooms are early, so that there must be no objection in that respect."

The Club, he continued, ought to be not only a pleasant place for recreation for the people of Banff but also a useful place where they could find magazines and literature

of the day to which they could not otherwise have access. He welcomed the fact that there were already a large number of subscribers to the newsroom alone who were not members of the Club, and he looked forward to the day when the numbers would increase as the newsroom's advantages became better known.

After suggesting that the Club would also be of great use to country members, Mr Gordon-Duff went on, "it will give the greatest pleasure to residents in the country to have some place to rest themselves when they come into this town, and to get shelter and not feel quite homeless, so that each member (though not burgesses) will feel himself to some extent a native of Banff and feel more at home when he comes to visit this ancient and evergreen burgh."

He paid tribute to the Club's promoters - confessing that he did not know exactly who they were - and said they had worked with great zeal, personal inconvenience and trouble to themselves. He concluded, "And now it only remains for the people of Banff, and for the country members also, to appreciate fully and support this institution, on both sides, and I trust that this Club that is now opened will be one of the many links which have united town with country."

Deputising for Provost Coutts, the Club's vice-president who was unable to attend the official opening, Bailie James Williamson gave a vote of thanks to Mr Gordon-Duff, expressing the hope that "all the good things that have been predicted of this institution will be fully fulfilled". The company then toured the clubrooms, watched a demonstration game of billiards and later adjourned to a wine and cake reception at the Fife Arms Hotel in Banff where the prosperity of the Club was duly pledged. A special vote of thanks was given to the Rev. Mr Chisholm, the parish priest who had so assiduously promoted the founding of the Club. Mr Chisholm was later to become the Very Rev. Bishop Chisholm, of Blairs College.

The "Banffshire Journal" which reported the opening ceremony in its columns concluded its account of the proceedings: "The clubhouse and newsroom were largely visited by members on Friday afternoon and evening, and all who came to the premises were hearty in their appreciation of the style in which the club is furnished and hopeful of its future usefulness."

The Club was now in business and on November 29, 1881, the first recorded ballot for membership took place in the presence of the secretary and treasurer. Elected were Robert Milner, flesher; Robert Hay, Journal Office; and Louis Shearer, clothier; all of Banff. In April of the following year the Council drafted their report to the first annual meeting, listing the membership at 86 - life (13), ordinary (30), annual (43). Subscribers to the newsroom numbered 38. They also disclosed that the cost of alterations and furnishings at the Clubrooms amounted to £369 3/1.

The Club, reported the Council, had got off to an encouraging start with attendances fully exceeding their expectations, the billiard and card rooms well patronised and the reading room also "largely taken advantage of". Drawings in the six months following the opening bore this out - £72 14/8. At the end of the first financial year the accounts showed a healthy credit balance of £105 9/-. That first annual meeting on April 27, 1882, attracted an attendance of only 22 members who adopted the Council's report and approved the financial statement. Three new members were appointed to the Council and several additions were made to the list of newspapers to be made available in the newsroom in the ensuing year.

Before the next annual meeting the Club was faced with finding a new keeper. Mr Alexander Munro, appointed the previous October, resigned within a year and then changed his mind after an interview with the Council who offered to re-engage him "to devote his whole time and attention to the business of the Club". His wage was fixed at 14/- per week, an increase of 6/6. However, he did not remain for any length of time and in February 1883 the Council were looking for a successor.

They drew up a short list of four likely candidates for the job, two from Aberdeen and one each from Banff and Keith. After interviewing all four they appointed Mr William Mulligan, Newmill, Keith, at a weekly wage of 14/- plus free house, coal and gas. He gave an undertaking that his children would not become "any source of annoyance to the Club and in the event of this being so that they were to be removed from the Club"

...

It was about this time - March 1883 - that a decline in membership and attendance at the newsroom became apparent and the annual charges for the newsroom were promptly amended to 10/6 for employers and 5/- for employees, compared to the original flat rate 10/6. Complaints from smokers that they were getting a raw deal led to an extraordinary general meeting where a policy of segregation was agreed. An upstairs room became the principal card room where smoking was permitted, and a ground floor room was allocated to non-smoking card-players.

In November H.R.H. The Prince of Wales (later King Edward 7) visited the Earl of Fife at Duff House and *en route* from Banff Harbour Station through the flag-bedecked streets of Banff he must have passed the Club's front door. The records don't tell if the members displayed their loyalty to the Crown in any distinctive fashion!

Perhaps they felt they had more important matters in mind, namely the possible purchase of the premises they leased from Mr Booth. The Council decided to offer £375 for the property, to include a portion occupied by a certain Thomas Paton, also with right to the rents. They sought entry at Whitsunday and suggested the expenses of the transaction should be mutual. At the same time the secretary was told to increase the offer by £25, with a free title, should their initial offer be refused.

The response from Mr Booth, a founder member, is not recorded but it must have been in the negative for at the 1884 annual meeting the Council were instructed to consider the renewal of the lease ... "and failing that to take into consideration the question of obtaining suitable premises for the Club".

And so at this very early stage in the Club's history, barely three years after its foundation, there was set in motion the train of events that were to lead to Banff Town and County Club acquiring the Clubrooms they have occupied for the past 97 years.

## ***New Clubrooms***

An ambitious Council, bent on the Club playing a more significant role in the social and recreational life of the community, as well as extending its activities, found No. 6 South Castle Street too restrictive. Their goal was larger and more permanent quarters, and the opportunity presented itself early in 1884. They learned that their landlord, Mr Booth, was against renewing the lease which at that time still had two years to run, and that he was prepared to sell the premises to the Club.

The shrewd businessmen who formed the Council at that time knew better than most

the state of the property market in Banff and unanimously agreed not to purchase. They had learned that spacious Boyndie House with adjacent grounds and garden was up for sale at a price then said to be £700 to £750, and they readily concluded that if found suitable the property would be a sound investment "at something like that price". It was only a short stroll from South Castle Street to Boyndie House and the Council members promptly adjourned their meeting - May 31, 1884 - to make a tour of inspection of the property and grounds. They came away convinced of its potential as new, permanent Clubrooms.

The secretary was immediately instructed to obtain his lowest price from the owner, Mr James Spence, a teacher at Banff Academy and when six days later it was submitted to the Council they agreed to recommend acceptance to an extraordinary general meeting of members fixed for June 17. In the meantime an anxious Mr Booth who had got wind of the Council's interest in Boyndie House (after all he was a member of the Club) promptly offered to sell No. 6 South Castle Street and although the Council rejected him they agreed to announce the offer to the special meeting, along with a detailed report by a subcommittee on Boyndie House's possibilities.

The crucial meeting at which the momentous decision to buy Boyndie House was taken attracted 23 members, several of whom were also acting as mandatories for a further 11 absentee members. A comprehensive report was submitted on behalf of the Council who emphasised at the outset that they had been "very anxiously and maturely" considering the important issues arising from Mr Booth's earlier decision not to renew their lease and his subsequent offer to sell them No. 6 South Castle Street.

Almost straight away the Council dismissed buying the South Castle Street property, contending it would not be a wise step because, they argued, the accommodation was barely sufficient nor over-convenient. Further, they reminded the members, their constitution contemplated an expansion of operations and the Club's success until then pointed to the desirability and necessity for this. The premises leased from Mr Booth were incapable of advisable or satisfactory extension even at a large cost, they added, and while they might have advised the purchase as a temporary arrangement there was at the time ample property for sale in Banff.

So having rejected the Booth offer outright, the Council proceeded to argue persuasively in favour of Boyndie House ... thus, "an opportunity now exists which should not be lost for securing on most favourable terms permanent premises in a most suitable situation giving most ample and highly convenient accommodation, with easy facility for large extension in the future."

Boyndie House, which they described as a "tenement", then comprised a ground staircase and lobby, vestibule, public rooms, bedrooms, dressing rooms, kitchen, scullery, pantries, wine cellars, etc., with underground vaults and upper garrets. The houses adjoining the property were rated at £20 per annum. The whole was on offer to the Club for £700, and that included grates, bells, water fittings, blinds, etc. But there was urgency, and the Club had only a 24-hour option.

The Council framed their case in favour of purchase with an introductory low-key explanation that if the Club's operations were to remain on the same restricted basis, then only a limited part of Boyndie House would be required. Sub-letting the remainder would enable the Club to occupy its own property at a less "rent" than it was then paying, yet with more extensive and convenient accommodation. Alternatively, they

added, the unused portion of the property could be sold.

This was not what a far-sighted Council really had in mind and they confided their hopes and aspirations to members: "The Council confidently look forward to it being resolved at no distant date to have such an expansion of the Club's operations as would necessitate the occupancy of the whole premises with continued, if not increased, financial success to the institution, an extended influence upon the social and moral habits of the community, and general advantage to the town and county."

They considered Boyndie House an exceptional opportunity to fulfil these aims and proceeded to outline the property's potential. Firstly, there could be separate entrances to the reading-room - an internal access for Club members and a street entrance for reading room members only. A public library could be set up in an adjoining room with a spare room, for conversation, chess and draughts. The property, they explained, could be adapted to provide overnight accommodation, 'with board and attendance', for the convenience and comfort of members, particularly those from the country district. The garden area, they added, could accommodate an open tennis court for members of the general public including, they made clear, women.

Their most striking proposal concerned the courtyard. In it they envisaged erecting a large hall "which would serve several ends urgently required in Banff" - for the parading of the Volunteers, large public meetings and, in inclement weather, indoor tennis. As for the cost, the Council argued that this could be borne jointly by the Club and the potential users.

Boldly they summed up the situation, "The Council think that with unity and harmony it is far from hopeless to aim at such an extension of the Club's energies towards increased opportunities for innocent recreation as well as intellectual and social enjoyment. The accomplishment would make the Club a very desirable institution."

They conjured up a glowing picture of the new-look Club: "Within its premises one, if so disposed, may have a quiet game of billiards, or a rubber at the whist table, or enjoy a lounge over the daily and weekly newspapers or monthly periodicals, or find store for study and more solid information in a well-stocked library. If he wishes to indulge in invigorating exercise he will find a tennis court in the garden for summer, and a covered court for all seasons. The advantages will be at the command of any gentleman coming to the town for a longer or shorter period who could at the same time, if so resolved on, have a suitable accommodation for bed and board within the premises."

For non-members the Council visualised a Club offering a select and central reading room and library, open and covered tennis courts ... "and such innocent attractions to spend an idle hour cannot fail to overcome desires for dangerous places of resort in spare time, and prove, it is hoped, a powerful element in the moral elevation of all classes of the community."

The Council's powerfully-argued report on the advantages of purchase had been circulated in advance to members who also had inspected plans of the property, and at the extraordinary general meeting there was little opposition. Mr Stevenson, Cairnborrow, proposed that they approve the report and, as recommended, purchase the property. Provost Robert Duncan seconded the motion. Mr Francis George, a solicitor member, queried just how the Club was to finance the purchase and was

promptly told the Council had made provision for that.

He retorted that he could take no part in the proposed resolution because he required more information than was contained in the Council's report and, in particular, he had no information of ability to enter on the proposed undertaking. The motion to purchase was then put to the meeting and approved with only one member, Mr John Coutts, dissenting.

The Council's report to the members also carried a telling postscript to the effect that Mr Booth had offered to sell No. 6 South Castle Street for £300. Tersely the Council commented, "Even if otherwise prepared to advise such a purchase, the Council could not recommend it at the price."

On the day following the meeting Mr Spence's offer to sell Boyndie House for £700 was formally accepted. Two Council members resigned for reasons unspecified in the records, and one of the vacancies was filled by Sheriff W. G. Scott Moncrieff, Sheriff-Substitute of Banffshire.

In due course the Club vacated No. 6 South Castle Street which later became the headquarters of the 1st Banff Royal Garrison Artillery Volunteers, instituted in 1882 as the Banffshire Artillery Brigade whose former Drill Hall in North Castle Street overlooked the harbour. The Volunteers paid £300 for the property which today, together with the adjoining No. 10 South Castle Street, accommodates the home-decorating shop and store of A. O. Chalmers.

### ***Boyndie House***

Boyndie House was erected in 1772 by George Robinson whose forebears and descendants made substantial contributions in a variety of ways to the life of Banff in the 18th and early 19th centuries. They hailed from Nottingham and one of them was cruelly murdered by English troops billeted in Banff following the Battle of Culloden.

The family founded an extensive thread manufacturing empire in the town, operating from Kingswell Lane where they produced, and exported through Banff Harbour, linen and stockings. Their contribution to the local economy can be assessed from one particularly busy era when the yearly return from thread manufactured in Banff and despatched to Nottingham totalled over £40,000. The labour force, recruited from throughout the district, ran into hundreds.

George Robinson, who built Boyndie House, married Miss Bathia Garden, daughter of a Banff merchant, George Garden, whose family tree boasted at least one provost of the burgh. The couple had three sons and five daughters, and father and one son - George Garden Robinson - had the unique distinction of being provosts of Banff, one or other, from 1784 to 1831, except for two separate spells each of three years.

Mr Neil McLaren, a Banff solicitor who is a senior member of the Club, has made a careful and detailed study of the title deeds relating to the Club property and in an absorbing account (1965) pinpoints a Disposition granted by George Garden to George Robinson dated February 10, 1772, of "All and Whole the ground right of the new house built by me (i.e. George Robinson) on the North side of the Street leading from the Greystone to the Gallowhill, with the house within the Close at the West end of the said House". This, he concluded, was almost certainly the present premises occupied by the Club and fixed the date of building Boyndie House as 1772.

George Robinson died in 1827, aged 84 years, and he left to his second son William his whole means and estate, including numerous heritable properties in Banff, comprising Bath House, near Banff Harbour, Limekilns, on the road to Macduff, Broadcroft in Sandyhills, Lands in Boyndie Street and Kingswell Lane, Banff, etc. Mr McLaren reported: "The lands in Boyndie Street and Kingswell Lane are described by reference to 14 different lots or land or buildings, some of which have disappeared or been altered and rebuilt and it is very difficult to identify them now. The greater part of these lots were at one time in the possession of George Robinson and George Robinson & Coy., Thread Manufacturers in Banff, as garden, dwelling house, stable, warehouses and manufacturing houses. One lot is described as 'All and hail that closs of bigging with the tenement and malt barn, kiln, cobble and yard which sometime pertained to John Copeland, Malster in Banff."

As Mr McLaren commented, "It is interesting to note that brewing or malting at one time took place on some part of the Club premises."

William Robinson survived his father by only a few years and died in 1831 without leaving a will. He could not have been as successful or as wealthy as his father for after his death a trustee was appointed and his eldest brother, George Garden Robinson, with the consent of the trustee, sold off the properties, including those in Boyndie Street and Kingswell Lane, in 1832. The purchaser, for £2920, was none other than his brother-in-law, Mr Stewart Souter, of Melrose, husband of Mary Robinson, second daughter of George Robinson.

Following Souter's death in 1839 his son, James Souter, Writer to the Signet, Edinburgh, completed title to the whole lands by Instruments of Sasine recorded in the Particular Register of Sasines, Reversions, etc., kept for the Burgh of Banff on December 18, 1846. James Souter died in 1858 and on March 17, 1877, his properties in Boyndie Street, Kingswell Lane and Castle Street were put up for sale at a public roup held in Banff's Fife Arms Hotel. They were bought by Mr Adam Ramsay, a Banff cabinetmaker, on behalf of Mr William Johnston, merchant, Baghdad, for £2,290.

The subsequent Disposition by the Trustees of James Souter was granted in favour of William Fraser Johnston, merchant in Baghdad, Turkish Arabia, and Mistress Alexandra Augustina De Marchie or Johnston, his wife, in life-rent, for her life-rent use, and in favour of Mary Elizabeth Kerr Johnston and Alice Kerr Johnston, "and the other children to be begotten of the marriage betwixt them, in fee ..."

Mr Johnston owned the properties from 1877 to 1882 and he was described as then residing in Banff, although there is no solid proof that he or his family ever occupied Boyndie House. In November 1882 the whole subjects were again put up for sale, divided into eight different lots. Lot No. 5, comprising Boyndie House and adjoining subjects measuring 126 feet along Boyndie Street and extending backwards 174 feet 7 inches on the eastern boundary, was purchased by Mr James Spence, school teacher. (At the sale Lot No. 3 at the North end of Kingswell Lane was bought by one Mr Alexander Munro, then keeper of the Club's premises at No. 6 South Castle Street).

The Disposition in favour of Mr Spence, dated December 8, 1882, was granted by William Johnston with consent of Mistress Alexandra Augustina De Marchie or Johnston, and made no reference to his daughters Mary and Alice who were also grantees in the previous Disposition of 1877. This omission prompted Mr McLaren to speculate in his report, "I imagine that William F. Johnston, while merchanting in



Turkish Arabia, had acquired the Turkish male's contempt or indifference to females, particularly unmarried ones, and had swept them aside as of no consequence when the time came to sell these properties. If I had been acting as law agent for the purchasers at that time I would have required an explanation from the sellers' agents for the omission of the names of the two daughters from the title deeds following the Disposition of 1877."

The Disposition bears Mr Johnston's signature and, in Arabic script, that of his wife Alexandra, and so the Club's title deeds have the doubtful distinction of including a signature that strongly resembles hieroglyphics!

Prior to Mr Spence acquiring it Boyndie House had been a ladies' school and a brief description of it was given in 1900 by Mr Garden M. Hossack, sheriff clerk, raconteur and original member of the Club, when he delivered a "Reminiscences of an Octogenarian" talk to the Banffshire Field Club. He mentioned that Banff was celebrated as a centre for the board and education of young ladies in the years between 1830 and 1890. A doctor's daughter, Miss Williamson, was the first to open an extensive establishment in Old Castlegate and the school expanded to such an extent, with pupils from all over the country attending it, that she moved to larger accommodation, Boyndie House. Mr Hossack, however, did not confirm that this Miss Williamson was in all probability a descendant of George Robinson, builder of Boyndie House.

But he did recall that the ladies' school had a teaching staff of seven or eight masters and governesses, teaching English, French and German to 50-60 resident boarders. The sight of pupils and staff taking their daily constitutional prompted him to describe the spectacle as resembling "a regiment of Amazons on the march!"

Towards the end of the 1870s, according to another historian, Boyndie House provided board and accommodation for youth attending Banff Academy and was administered by Mr Spence whom he described as "chief usher" and English teacher. It had "all the appliances for comfort, cleanliness and satisfactory domicile for the young people committed to his charge". Mr Spence, who subsequently sold it to the Club, was himself an original member of the Club and a founder secretary of Banffshire Field Club.

In 1919 a historian wrote the following description of the Club premises: "A large L-shaped hall leads to a stone staircase with domed and ornamental ceiling. The billiard room was the chief reception room. Its doorway has carved fluted pilasters with acanthus-leafed capitals. The wooden chimney-piece is elaborately carved with floral ornaments and has a thistle on the right and a rose on the left, George Robinson being English and his wife Scotch. The middle window has a circular top with carved woodwork and is flanked by pilasters similar to those of the door. There is a good frieze, cornice and centrepiece to the ceiling. The decorations resemble some in Duff House and were probably designed by William Adam.

"The larger kitchen was formerly a reception room. A much older kitchen, with an arched ingle-neuk, opens off it. The entrance was from North Castle Street, through a court opposite to Castle Lane, and by a drive through the grounds which extended to Stuart Street (formerly Kingswell Lane) and northward as far as the Free Church."

Other local writers of the 19th century confirm the entrance at the time of the Robinson

family was from North Castle Street with a winding drive through the grounds to the main door. Subsequently with the erection of houses around the garden area a new front entrance was created.

The Club's "Adam Connection" has persisted for more than a century. The noted Scots architect brothers are said to have been responsible for the mantelpiece and the design of what was until recent years the main billiard room. As long ago as 1929 the theory was put to the test. The Council of the day ordered a report from a specialist in order to satisfy their own curiosity and the following was the outcome:

"The three separate designs employed for the embellishment of the mantelpiece, doorway and window are proof that these features were not actually designed by the brothers Adam for the positions which they occupy. Apart from the fact that these famous architects would not have used different designs for various features which were to be placed in juxtaposition, the designs in themselves lack the chaste simplicity which one associates with the work of the gifted Scotsmen who did so much towards repressing the tendency to extravagance in ornament which enjoyed a short-lived popularity in Britain from 1750-1760.

"Doubtless the design of the three features was largely influenced by the prevailing fashion for Classical designs with which the Adams were associated, but here the association ends. We date the three examples at 1790, or thereabouts, and we value them at £120,"

### ***A Time For Expansion***

With the acquisition of Boyndie House the Club had achieved a major ambition, their own Clubrooms accommodated in a historic, handsome and commodious building. They also owned adjoining properties and land, thus affording ample scope for the expansion which the Council envisaged and were determined to undertake.

On taking over the building, along with the furnishings, they promptly insured it for £1,350 and put in hand the leasing of the properties surplus to requirements. In that exciting summer of 1884 the Council instructed repairs and redecoration, carefully ordering only "cheap penny paper". The total bill for the initial alterations, repairs and additions amounted to just over £66, of which £20 went on a boundary wall.

It was not traditional Victorian thrift that dictated the prudence. The Council were simply low on funds, having embarked on the renovations with less than £130 in the bank. They had a loan of £400 over the premises and there came a day when the lender threatened not to renew it except on his special conditions.

There's just a hint of audacity in the manner they set about providing the additional amenities for the members. Funds may have been short at the time but they were determined to fulfil the high hopes expressed when they persuaded the members to buy Boyndie House. The Rev. Aeneas Chisholm, ever the optimist, proposed that a bowling green should be laid out and plans for this, along with a tennis court, were ordered. Additional ground for the green was essential and a strip of land was acquired from an adjacent proprietor, Provost James Williamson, for £35. The civic head loaned the sum at five per cent interest and Mr Chisholm promised to raise the funds to pay for the construction work.

Laying out the tennis court necessitated the demolition of a rear bedroom wing of the

premises and the proposal created controversy. One member, in condemning the scheme, warned of resulting dampness and devaluation of their property. He also contended that a ball boy would have to be employed, that the court would be wet in winter because of melting snow and that bowlers on the adjoining green would be continually harassed by wayward tennis balls.

It had been made a condition that the bowling green and tennis court project should not be undertaken until a £600 loan over the premises was obtained, and this persistent objector claimed the Club would be unable to repay the proposed loan under the terms then being negotiated.

The loan, at five per cent interest payable half-yearly, was eventually granted by ex-Provost William Coutts, the Club's benevolent vice-president, on the strict understanding that the rear wing of Boyndie House had to be demolished. Other conditions were imposed. The Club could repay the £600 at the end of the first year if they secured money on easier terms, but failing that they had to pay Mr Coutts £40 to account at Whitsun 1886 and then proceed to reduce the debt to £400 by annual payments in successive years of £40.

Mr Coutts also insisted that the Club maintain the premises in repair, meet all public local and other burdens, and insure the building for £1,200 against fire ... "for I think there is too much allowance for smoking permitted". He was not anxious to push the transaction, he said, and he would be quite pleased if the Club secured a loan on better or more favourable terms ... "for I have only consented to enter on it in the perfectly sincere hope that the Club may thereby be enabled to provide funds for the ultimate liquidation of the whole debt on their premises." Almost half-a-century was to pass before that happy situation was to prevail!

By the time of the first annual meeting to be held in Boyndie House, a growing interest in the Club's activities became apparent among members and also in the community at large. Membership rose sharply and soon fell short of the maximum permitted 100 by only five. One note of regret was struck in the Council's 1884-85 annual report: a decline in the numbers using the newsroom.

In May 1885 an offer was accepted for demolishing the back wing to allow for the formation of the tennis court and in mid-summer limited play commenced on the bowling green at a charge of one penny per bowl per game of 21! The green's construction and layout presented problems but following excavation the foundations were laid and a "fine old turf" was put down under the direction of a Mr Maver, of Aberdeen Bowling Club. Excavation and levelling were also essential to prepare the way for the tennis court, the foundations of which comprised one foot of metal topped with a concrete surface which was laid by a Turriff mason under the supervision of a Macduff builder.

On a bright, sunny Saturday afternoon (August 15, 1885) the official opening took place before a company of 120 with the Banffshire Artillery Brigade Band in attendance. In performing the ceremony Sheriff W. G. Scott Moncrieff, a member of the Council, sang the green's praises and described it as second to none in the North of Scotland, or indeed in any part of the country.

Referring to the then prevalent demand in the North-east for public bowling greens and tennis courts he said that when he first arrived in the area he had been struck to find it

lagging behind the South in the provision of such sporting amenities. It was now catching up and he was glad that Banff was in the vanguard. The indefatigable Rev. Mr Chisholm, whose fund-raising activities and general enthusiasm for the project largely helped equip the Club with their new outdoor amenities, received a special vote of thanks and was made a life member.

Following the opening ceremony play took place on both tennis court and bowling green but it is recorded that "the ladies for the most part remained and looked on and enjoyed the music". Within a month the Council relented and women were permitted the use of the tennis courts at an annual fee of 2/6. A similar charge had been fixed previously for members' sons under 18 years, and newsroom subscribers.

Before the onset of another winter someone was suggesting, perhaps mischievously, that the tennis court should double as a winter skating rink.

Contrary to expectations the opening of the bowling green and tennis court did not immediately precipitate an upsurge in the Club's popularity among members. While on one night no fewer than eleven new members were elected the amenities provided, ranging from cards and billiards to tennis and bowls, were not over patronised. Indeed as an added inducement the charges were reduced from time to time.

An encouraging development about this time was the number of local organisations seeking to lease rooms in Boyndie House. Among them was the prestigious Banffshire Field Club. Rooms were also let for golf club meetings, shorthand-writing classes and first-aid tuition. The rent income, although small, was nevertheless doubly welcome, for hanging over the Club's head during the struggle to become a viable organisation was the Coutts loan with its condition that £40 had to be repaid annually.

New faces began to appear around the Council table. Mr James Morrison, the founder-secretary, resigned and was succeeded, in turn, by Mr Anthony Gordon and then Mr George A. Duncan, of Banff Foundry. Mr John P. Gordon, of Cairnfield, president when Boyndie House was bought, made way for the Earl of Fife in 1889, His Grace's wedding year when the Club marked the nuptials by purchasing a flag costing a princely 19/6.

Accounts were closely scrutinised and six-monthly statements of income and expenditure were presented to the Council. A smoking concert with a sixpenny admission charge netted a profit of 18/-. Although by 1891 the Club was running at a loss the Council had made good the undertaking to the now deceased Mr Coutts and paid the first £40 instalment towards reducing the debt to £400.

Income from any source was welcome at this stage in the Club's development and life membership at £20 was offered to the new Banffshire M.P. Undeterred by an initial rebuff the Council persisted and suggested he become an ordinary member at 10/6 per annum plus a £5 entry fee. The politician remained adamant but the Council came back with an offer of annual membership (one guinea) "in view of the subscription being so small". Whether or not they got their man is not recorded.

Club annual meetings were switched from early afternoon to evening affairs. When the change was first mooted in the early years it was instantly rejected because, according to the Council, "there are various gentlemen largely interested in the welfare of the Club prefer the present arrangement".

Those early formative years were also fraught with complaints, some trivial and others more serious. Indignant members reported the unauthorised removal of publications from the newsroom and the mutilation of some newspapers by one member persistently taking "cuttings". A vigilant burgh sanitary inspector condemned the state of the Club's toilets and it cost £19 14/- in essential repairs before he was pacified.

By the mid-1890s there were only five newsroom subscribers. Finances were tight and, ignoring instructions from successive annual meetings, the Council withheld the promised regular annual repayments to the Coutts Trustees. In view of the financial plight they embarked on re-negotiating the loan, their sights set on a reduction in the interest rate. Security was demanded by the Trustees who suggested that a valuation of the property should be made and that, whatever it came to, they would allow two-thirds of it to remain as a loan. However, the Trustees added that if the existing sum then standing on loan - £520 - exceeded the two-thirds then the Club would have to pay the difference.

On that basis, they said, they were prepared to reduce the interest rate by one per cent to four per cent. A valuation was duly obtained: £735 for the building and £96 13/- for fittings and furnishings.

In addition to re-negotiating the Coutts loan, the Council resolved to repay the £35 loaned by Provost James Williamson when he sold land required for the Club's bowling green. It was entirely due to the resourcefulness of one Council member, Mr John Graham, that this loan was repaid and more favourable terms were obtained for repaying the Coutts loan. With the blessing of his fellow Council members he canvassed members for interest-free loans of £6, repayable at £1 per annum. He told them his twin-objective: reducing the Coutts loan to £450 by repaying £70 of the capital sum, and wiping out the £35 Williamson loan.

By the end of 1895 he had succeeded in his mission and the Club enjoyed a double Christmas present that year. The Coutts loan was reduced and the interest rate cut to four per cent. It took seven months to complete the negotiations for paying off the Williamson loan and obtaining title to the ground. The Council duly received the Disposition and Minute of Agreement in January 1896.

### ***'Phone and Staff Problems***

Although some ten years had elapsed since the move to Boyndie House the members had not abandoned entirely their ambitious hopes for another major project within its grounds. In 1895 the secretary placed before the Council plans for a new community hall measuring 90 ft. by 35 ft. and costing an estimated £354. But that was as far as it went. The scheme never materialised.

It was also about this time the Club buildings became among the first in town to be fitted with the telephone, a development that was to cause bitter disputes over the years. The National Telephone Company, Aberdeen, were permitted to locate the plant on the roof of the premises, provided there were sufficient subscribers in Banff prepared to pay £8 10/- annually, restricted to £6 10/- until the Banff Exchange was linked to the Company's inter-town system in Scotland. The necessary way-leaves were granted on condition the Club was relieved of any damage sustained through the presence of wires and plant.

Within two years the Club was contemplating a disconnection of the phone. The Council sought a reduction in the phone bill to £3 per annum because, as they astutely reminded the Company, the greater part of Banff was being served by plant erected on Club property. The response from the telephone authorities could not have been encouraging for the Council promptly recommended to an extraordinary general meeting that the whole plant, poles, etc. should be removed and the building restored to its original state.

The members could not agree on the future of the phone. Some favoured the introduction of a penny charge per call but were told the telephone company were prohibited from making any charge unless the Club became a public call office. At the end of the day a majority voted in favour of retaining the phone for one year at the same rate on condition the telephone company paid the Club £1 10/- annually for way-leaves. The company agreed.

Some three years later, with finances again in a parlous state, another attempt was made by members to have the phone removed. A group of them pointed out that very little advantage was being taken of it, with an average of one call per week, which, bearing the annual rate in mind, worked out at 3/- per call. But with a new contract recently concluded the annual meeting decided to leave the matter in abeyance.

The anti-phone brigade were not to be silenced, and they had the ear of the Council for in 1901 they recommended disconnecting the phone. But at a subsequent annual meeting it was decided by 11 votes to 5 to ask the telephone company to accept an annual rate of £3 10/- with members paying their own calls. The company's response was to suggest that the Club go on the new "Message Rate System" which meant paying one penny for each call.

This was put to the members and a last-ditch bid to have the telephone removed was fended off by eight votes. And, of course, the telephone remains in the premises to this day, albeit down through the years, before Banff had an automatic exchange and later subscriber trunk dialling, there were sporadic complaints about non-payment by members of their trunk calls!

During the past 100 years the Club have been fortunate in their choice of staff. Each keeper-steward has brought his or her particular skills to the job, and loyalty, devotion and discretion have been distinctive features of their service. Indeed the fact that of the ten who have filled the keeper's position since 1881 two between them served for more than 50 years is in itself testimony to the Club's sound judgement in labour relations!

Employer and employee, however, have not always seen eye to eye. One of the earlier keepers, judging from the varied entries concerning him in the record books, must have appeared to the Council as something of a Jekyll and Hyde character. On one occasion they awarded him a £5 gratuity for his good work and then granted him and his wife a fortnight's paid holiday. They in turn responded when the Club struck hard times by gracefully accepting a wage cut of three shillings per week.

And yet on at least half-a-dozen occasions this self-same keeper was formally threatened with dismissal for lapses of conduct arising out of an over-fondness for liquor that resulted in neglect of duties. His behaviour was once described to the Council as "utterly discreditable, a disgrace to himself and the institution of which he

has charge ... " His pay was slashed for a period because of misdemeanours and considering his wage at the time was 18/- per week, this was a harsh sentence indeed.

One Christmas Eve the vice-president reported him for misbehaving and then hastily counselled his colleagues to be lenient. In fact a group of 36 members, fearing his instant dismissal, actually requisitioned an extraordinary general meeting. On another occasion he tendered his resignation on the assumption the Council would implement the dismissal threat because he had once again gone over the score. A solicitor-member eloquently, and successfully, interceded on his behalf.

But when it came to his retirement, the Council minuted the members' entire satisfaction at the manner in which he and his wife had performed their duties, recording their appreciation of long and faithful service. Their successors were a retired Metropolitan policeman and his wife who made such a striking impact, especially with prudent supervision over the fuel bill, that the wage was increased from 10/- to 12/- weekly. In "sad and trying" circumstances, due to persistent ill-health, he was given notice and his temporary relief, a commercial traveller, took over. He and his wife received special permission to take in a lodger ... provided that latter became a Club member.

### ***War and The Roaring 20's***

The year 1911 was a grim one for the Club, alleviated somewhat when a generous vice-president, virtually on his death bed, donated £5 to help reduce the debt. The Coutts' Trustees called up the £450 loan on the property and furnishings and the Council had no option but to find a new guarantor. He was Mr William C. Dawes, Mount Ephraim, Faversham, Kent, who had family associations with Banff. He advanced £450 at four per cent interest and a few months later was "rewarded" by being appointed Club president even before his election as a member. The legal costs for obtaining the discharge from the old bond and negotiating the new were met from a reserve fund established some years earlier.

The following year was even more of a trial. Membership had slumped to 44, the bowling green was out of commission and income from all sources fell dramatically. On top of this, two tenants of Club properties departed with a consequent loss of income. Despite these set-backs the Council steadfastly refused to sell off part of the bowling green to an adjoining proprietor who offered £20 for it. Events took a turn for the better in 1912-13 as a result of exercising strict economy. Debt to the bank was cleared and the bowling green was repaired through voluntary contributions.

In the Spring preceding the outbreak of the First World War the members became concerned about the gradual deterioration of the property. Exterior and interior were in a dilapidated state and the keeper's house merited the description "most uninhabitable". An improvement scheme was prepared and to meet the estimated cost of almost £70 an appeal fund was launched. No contribution was considered too small and the £2 18/10 free proceeds from a smoking concert arranged by a local music teacher, Mr McLeod Brown, were gratefully accepted.

The repair scheme was brought to a premature and temporary halt through shortage of funds. Some members apparently were no longer in a position to contribute as liberally as they originally promised, and the outbreak of war was blamed for that. The improvements, however, were eventually completed and all bills paid.

The war years not unexpectedly had a marked effect on Club affairs. At the start of 1915 there were over 70 members and the books showed a healthy balance of £70. There was a peremptory demand, acceded to, from the bondholder to insure the premises against aircraft and bombardment risks and then, reflecting the rise in war-time living costs, the keeper's salary had to be raised. In addition he was generously rewarded with a four shillings per week "war bonus."

The call to arms affected the membership which tumbled to 54 with a consequent catastrophic decline in revenue. Faced with a debit balance in the books the remaining members rejected their Council's proposed 10/6 increase in annual subscriptions and proceeded to raise £20 among themselves to wipe out the deficit. The following year, with the financial plight little improved, they turned down a suggested five shillings per head levy in favour of another special appeal in order to square the books.

In coping with the precarious financial state of affairs drastic steps were essential, such as closing the reading room to economise on fuel costs. The cash crisis persisted until the end of the war but shortly after the 1918 Armistice the members celebrated what was, and still is, a unique financial achievement in the Club's history: a financial year completed with the books exactly square!

In the decade that followed the First World War's ending the Club's fortunes, financial and otherwise, see-sawed spectacularly. Membership reached hitherto unknown heights, several innovations added to the variety of day-to-day life within the Club and at the dawning of the 1930s came a historic turning point.

Demobilisation coincided with renewed interest in Club affairs but subsequent fluctuations at Boyndie House were probably a reflection of local disillusionment that the "land fit for heroes" was not materialising. At the outset of the post-war era there was a dramatic influx of new blood. On one night no fewer than 20 new members were balloted and they included four grocers, three insurance men, a builder, ironmonger, teacher, slater, stationer, shoemaker, gas manager, chemist and hair-dresser. Within a remarkably short time the membership roll stood at 100 and finances were in the black.

An annual "At Home", with whist and dancing, became a popular function in Banff, the venue being the Fife Arms Hotel. A second billiard table was acquired to relieve the increasing demands on the only other one. It was positioned in the reading room and to ensure proper supervision of both tables a doorway was opened between the main billiard room and the passage leading to the reading room. The new table turned out to be a short-term money-spinner and was eventually disposed of to an Italian restaurateur who paid £40 for table plus cues, balls, rests and frames. The deal earned the Club a £14 profit.

History was made when the annual subscription was raised for the first time during the 1920s. An earlier attempt to double it to two guineas was roundly defeated on a vote with sceptics warning of internal friction if such "drastic" action to boost finances was adopted. But later, during a less contentious phase, the subscription was increased by a half-guinea to £1 11/6.

The boom that marked the immediate post-war era did not last and as the "Roaring Twenties" progressed the Club again ran into heavy weather. The saviour turned out to be one of the younger Council members, Mr James C. Rankine, later a



distinguished provost of Banff. He produced a revolutionary money-making scheme - the "Derby Sweep" which went on to become one of the annual "events" in the town. The profit from the first one amounted to £69 and effectively cleared an embarrassing deficit.

Additional income at this time also resulted from an upward revision of rents charged to the eight tenants occupying Club properties at Nos. 9, 11 and 15 Boyndie Street. The annual increases imposed ranged from 9/- to £2 5/- and boosted total rent income to the Club by over £10.

In the mid-1920s came a crushing set-back to hopes of further expansion. The executors of the bond-holder's estate sought immediate repayment of the £450 loan, and for several months the Club engaged in a long drawn-out quest for a fresh loan. At first the solution appeared patently obvious: sell off some of the properties.

Public advertisement produced no potential purchasers, although offers were made in private. Encouraged by this the Council proceeded to arrange a public auction - in the card-room - of Nos. 15 and 11 at an upset price of £260. Again there were no takers and the Council turned to Banff Town and County Property Investment Company for financial assistance. The latter refused a loan even with a Club promise to buy £150 of their shares.

Almost in desperation, the Club resorted to advertising for a £450 loan at five per cent interest, only to be met with a 'nil' response. The situation daily became more acute with pressure being applied to repay the £450. Eventually a local resident came to the rescue, agreeing to replace the loan for five years from Whitsun 1925. Yet another financial crisis, the most serious to date, had been weathered. As a postscript, the Club sold off No. 15 Boyndie Street the following year to Banff artist-photographer Harry Holman, and out of the £175 sale proceeds applied £150 towards reducing the debt to their new bond-holder to £300.

During these anxious months when the very future of the Club appeared under threat, a guiding hand towards improved financial stability was provided by Mr Vincent Desson, the newly-appointed secretary-treasurer and factor for the Club properties. The crisis was his testing introduction to the position which he went on to occupy for 14 years. In the latter part of the 1920s he had as his Council chairman, Mr James Kerr, the Club's first "working" president.

For almost half-a-century it had become accepted practice for the vice-president to take the chair at Council and other Club meetings. Presidents were rarely, if ever, known to preside except on social occasions. In 1926 Mr Thomas Barton, Banff Castle, who had been president for five years, became the first hon. president, and Mr Kerr, then vice-president, was promoted president. He held the office with great acceptance by the members for 20 years.

Messrs. Kerr and Desson were at the helm when the improved state of finances, stemming partly from the success of Mr Rankine's popular annual "Derby Sweep", permitted a welcome improvement in Boyndie House's comforts. A central heating system was installed in 1926, the same year as a woman caretaker was appointed. She was Mrs Jane Dustan, a quietly-efficient, hard-working employee who for almost three decades enjoyed the respect, confidence and friendship of members. At the time of her appointment the Club also engaged a billiard-room attendant.

An ever-recurring problem in the 1920s was the mixed popularity of the bowling green. Indeed, in one season there were no drawings at all and when the staff of the Banffshire Journal Ltd., Banff, applied to rent it, the Council readily agreed. They must have been disappointed when the printers abandoned the idea. On another occasion a bus company searching for a garage site in Castle Street put out feelers for the green and the Council decided to negotiate on the basis of an asking price of £100. Again the project fell through.

In time a group of members formed a committee to revive bowling and the Council permitted them to retain the fees so long as they maintained the green. It was also made a condition that no Banff residents, apart from Club members, would be allowed on the green. Just why remains obscure. Within a couple of years the Council assumed full control of the green and one of the social events of the Banff calendar in 1931 was a memorable garden party given by Mr Barton, hon. president, to mark the opening of the Club's bowling season.

It was also the Club's golden jubilee year, but no one appears to have remembered ...

## ***A New Era***

If the ambitious and bold acquisition of Boyndie House in 1884 as a permanent home was the first milestone in the Club's history, then becoming registered under the Licensing Acts in 1930 was undoubtedly the second. Few would argue it was a radical departure from the hitherto sedate social order of things. Others might venture to suggest it was a natural development. It certainly ushered in a new era in the life and times of Banff Town and County Club.

The preliminary steps were taken at the 1929 annual general meeting when considerable discussion centred on a suggestion that a licence to sell liquor and tobacco should be obtained. In the summer months that followed the Council obtained and duly studied the rules and regulations of the Aberdeen Constitution Club, and contemplated how a similar set could be adapted to a licensed Town and County Club. In September the legal steps necessary to have the Club registered were outlined by a legal adviser.

He explained that the existing Articles of Association and Rules would require amendment; that two Justices of the Peace (or magistrates) would have to certify that the Club would be conducted as a bona fide club (and not mainly for the supply of excisable liquor); that application had to be made to the Sheriff for registration, supplying His Lordship with a copy of the rules, a list of officials, committee members and the certification by the Justices. He also pointed out that as the Club had a Board of Trade licence to dispense with the word "Limited" from its name, any alterations in the Articles of Association had to be submitted for their approval.

Three extraordinary general meetings of members followed in the ensuing months. The first was attended by only 16 despite a prior plea emphasising the meeting's importance. By nine votes to three it was decided to proceed. From then on things began to move more rapidly. In January 1930 new draft Articles of Association, along with rules and bye-laws, were approved for submission to the second meeting. This attracted 24 members and they formally approved the repeal of the then existing Articles of Association, etc., and the adoption of the new ones. Without dissent a motion to authorise the secretary to apply for a certificate of registration was passed.

On the eve of the granting of the certificate the third extraordinary general meeting fixed the permitted hours for supplying drinks to members as: week-days, 11 a.m.-1.30 p.m.; 4.30 p.m.-10 p.m.; Christmas Day and Good Friday, 12 noon-2 p.m.; 7 p.m.-10 p.m.

The next task was to provide the necessary facilities for dispensing liquor, and a "new" lounge was created. The former reading room from which the second billiard table had been removed several years earlier was converted for the purpose. A partition was erected and a service hatch provided. A new fire-place was installed in the room. The total cost of the alterations, which also involved erecting shelves, lining walls, altering gas-piping, and re-decoration, amounted to £100. During the period of the conversion members enjoyed refreshments served in the card-room daily for one hour only between 9 p.m. and 10 p.m.

The new-look lounge was formally opened on July 2, 1930, and the celebrations took the form of an afternoon tea! The ceremony, attended by members and friends, was performed by Lt.-Col. T. A. Simpson, Colleonard, Banff, who at the time was the sole "ordinary", as opposed to "annual", member of the Club. Mr Barton, hon. president, played host along with Mr Kerr, president, and Mr William Levenie, vice-president. The company of over 50 enjoyed tea, strawberries and ices.

In the decade that followed - the "Hungry Thirties" for so many - the Club flourished as never before. Boyndie House was increasingly popular among members who previously had sought relaxation elsewhere of an evening, and the newly-opened lounge soon required additional seating.

The card room shared in the boom and became a mecca for local and visiting bridge players. The cards committee, members of the Scottish Bridge Union and affiliated to the Aberdeen and District Bridge League, founded the Banff and District Bridge League. Teams from far and near were guests of the Club and the Council, always the perfect hosts, occasionally extended the time of closure by one hour. An annual ladies' bridge night was introduced and enjoyed immense popularity.

Other social events in the Club's calendar during this golden era included the winter "At Homes" in Banff's Fife Arms Hotel and a summer garden party at the tennis court and bowling green. For the formal "At Home" (ticket: one guinea) a special invitation list existed and was annually vetted. Generally the function showed a tiny profit and as a gesture to a diligent secretary for his efforts in arranging the event the Council generously refunded his ticket. On at least one occasion the profit also allowed a 16/- donation to be made to the local Lifeboat Institution.

The expenses of the garden party, usually between £20 and £30, were borne entirely by the Club. Here there was also a special guest list, revised from time to time, and including those who were also guests at the annual "At Homes". But as the depressing Thirties advanced, and war clouds began to gather, serious-minded members questioned whether such functions should continue to feature in Banff's social calendar, and there came a time when only two votes stood between the garden party and its demise.

Financially the Club went from strength to strength during the 1930s. Regular donations were made to Banff's Chalmers Hospital, a two-guinea fee was paid annually to have the Club's three clocks regularly wound, and prices were marginally

reduced from time to time as the lounge profits hit the 25 per cent. mark.

A matter for quiet celebration and self-congratulation in 1933 was the repayment of the £300 bond outstanding on the premises. For well nigh half-a-century there had been a loan over Boyndie House, at one time standing at £600, but within three years of the Club obtaining a licence all financial burdens had been lifted. It was also in 1933 that Mrs Dustan, first and only woman caretaker, had her duties and responsibilities extended on the death of Mr Tom Childs, the steward for six years. She became the official Club Mistress with a paid assistant.

Further interior alterations were carried out to improve the lounge and the £234 bill, including the cost of a new carpet, was met partly from the "Derby Sweep" Fund. In 1938, after giving the matter mature thought for three years, the members requested the installation of electricity, and this project was duly undertaken at a cost of £51, plus £34 for necessary redecoration.

The bowling green and tennis court remained ever popular and there even came a day when the law sought the exclusive privileges of the green. Banffshire Constabulary Sports Club expressed a wish "to play with privacy and convenience", but whether it was the proposed rent of £3 or suggested restrictions that deterred them, the Police dropped their request. The improved financial position also enabled the re-purchase of the west wing property sold for £175 to Mr Harry Holman in 1926. It was bought back for £110 and part of it let to a press photographer for £5 per annum.

### ***A War-Time Club***

A certain Adolph Hitler made life less than comfortable for those Club members exempted from military service for a variety of reasons. Even during the phoney war period prior to the outbreak of hostilities in 1939 his war-mongering prompted a prudent secretary to accumulate whisky reserves in anticipation of some form of rationing which he euphemistically termed "commutation of supplies by Government."

By the summer of 1941, with the war in full swing, no member was being permitted to purchase a bottle of whisky for off-premises consumption, although a concession was promised if and when extra supplies materialised. At one stage during the war the Club "survived" four months without whisky supplies from their main source. Prices, of course, soared as taxation increased and stocks diminished.

War-time atmosphere and colour were brought to the premises by military personnel stationed in the Banff area. Commissioned officers were welcome guests. Early in the war it had been agreed all officers should be accorded the privilege of honorary membership but this decision was to become an embarrassment, and a major headache, when an airfield was constructed on the outskirts of the town. As aircrew and ground staff descended by the hundred at the R.A.F. station the Club found itself with only 13 vacancies for full membership. It was also obvious there was neither accommodation for large numbers, nor sufficient stocks to provide the appropriate hospitality. The solution was to grant hon. membership only to those on the station's permanent staff whose Commanding Officer at the time was Lord Beaverbrooke's son, Group Captain Max Aitken.

Throughout the war years the financial position remained remarkably stable and indeed healthy, and even stretched to the purchase of a radio! That the Club continued

to operate harmoniously, providing a comfortable haven for the war-weary in and out of uniform, was due in no small measure to a caring president, ex-Bailie James Kerr, and his careworn secretary, Mr Walter H. Maxwell, a Banff bank manager.

Within a year of the war's ending both had retired from office. The new secretary, Mr Richard M. Webster, recently returned from R.A.F. service, was early reporting to the new president, Provost John C. Addison, that the 1946 membership had reached the 100-mark. By coincidence a quarter-of-a-century earlier the century membership milestone had been reached also during an immediate post-war period.

The pre-war pattern of Club life was soon re-established. Ladies' nights were revived and became so popular that the fair sex were visitors at weekly card-playing sessions. The bowling green was partly re-turfed but the tennis court, its equipment dilapidated beyond repair, closed down for good some 60 years after its formal opening in 1885. Over the years many an aspiring Fred Perry and Suzanne Lenglen had put racquet to ball for the first time on the Club's tennis court.

Maintaining the property has always been uppermost in the minds of successive Councils and in that post-war period substantial repairs and improvements were effected, including the re-harling of the building, installation of a complete central heating system and renovation of the caretaker's house. The overall cost exceeded £1000 and it was money well spent.

But even this prudent spending came against a disquieting background. Grumbings were being heard about "the lack of attending members." Although membership was high, and subscriptions rarely in arrears, many were not taking advantage of the facilities and a frequently-voiced complaint was that the few were responsible for maintaining the Club's entire finances and administration.

In 1950 the membership limit was raised from 100 to 120 in view of a lengthening waiting list and subsequently 18 newcomers were introduced to the comparative quiet and cosy confines of the Club. An innovation about this time was a policy of "laying down" whisky at bond, an astute move in the light of events to come less than a decade later.

An annual Burns Supper became a feature and was some compensation for those senior members with memories of the pre-war "At Homes". Originally mooted before the war, when the proposition was studiously ignored by the majority, the annual tribute to Scotland's National Bard was for some years an enjoyable January "night out", initially restricted to members only, with guest speakers and entertainers, and later patronised by many guests.

One item of totally unexpected expenditure was a repair bill following the Great Gale of January 1953 which blew down a boundary fence and was responsible for a £200 bill for a replacement concrete wall. The same year the west wing of the property, the subject of numerous transactions over the years, was sold to A. D. Walker Ltd. for £100.

The initial post-war euphoria faded and gave way to a disheartening decline. The special "occasions" - ladies' nights, Burns Suppers, bowling matches - remained popular but gradually it became evident the Club no longer enjoyed the whole-hearted support of members. An older generation of loyal members was slipping away and membership of the Club ceased to be the much sought-after "prize" of past years. In a

three-year period only ten applications for membership were received and the ever-recurring theme at annual meetings was the non-attendance of members. The balance sheet reflected the downward spiral and the annual subscription was raised to £2 2/-.

Basically the financial position was secure but with income dropping by anything up to £300 annually ever-increasing deficits became the rule rather than the exception. Regular appeals went out from the then secretary-treasurer to husband reserves against an inevitable "rainy day" and these were accompanied by dire warnings that subscriptions would have to be raised again to avoid raiding the reserve funds.

The whisky-at-bond was a God-send to a worried Council. One lot which cost £199 to lay down was sold for £745 and despite a £200 tax bill the deal enabled the Club to enter the 1960s with a surplus on the year's workings. The Club secretary, however, persisted with his warnings. Mr James Graham, never one to beat about the bush, declared, "The Club is one of the few such organisations attempting to operate without regard to increased costs and with no corresponding increase in income."

And while the president in re-assuring voice maintained there was no call for panic measures (after all they had £2000 in the kitty) bar prices were raised to a more realistic level, and at an extraordinary general meeting in 1961 subscriptions were doubled to £4. 4/-. The roll of members promptly slumped to 73 and the annual losses continued. The Council were forced to transfer money from the savings account to current account to meet the day-to-day running costs.

### ***The Club Re-Vitalised***

Clearly drastic action was necessary to prevent the Club sinking into near-oblivion although the realisation that something had to be done to arrest the steady decline did not emerge overnight. But by the annual meeting of 1964 complacency had given way to concern and the Council placed a thought-provoking item on the agenda, "The Future of the Club". The general consensus was that to compete with the counter-attractions persuasively on offer at public places of entertainment and recreation the Club had to move with the times and brush up its image.

The process of re-vitalisation was tackled with verve, imagination, gusto ... and not a little trepidation. The Council of the day were blessed with the same ambitious foresight as their predecessors who bought Boyndie House and, during a sticky period, secured a liquor licence. They knew major surgery was required.

Their immediate target was the construction of a modern cocktail bar to replace the traditional "hatch", survivor of the early licensing days. A "powder room" was opened for the increasing number of lady guests being introduced to the Club. Fund-raising "sweeps" of the kind that saved the Club more than 40 years before were re-introduced, and the rules were amended to make it permissible for a member to introduce up to five guests at a time.

The improved lounge with sparkling cocktail bar proved a hit. The longed-for resurgence of interest rapidly materialised and together with the appearance in the premises of gaming machines combined to halt the downward trend. Healthy balance-sheets re-appeared and provided a solid spring-board for further expansion. In ten years from 1965 onwards well in excess of £10,000 was spent on capital improvements comprising a series of well-planned schemes specifically designed to

cater for an increasing membership.

The billiard room, following service to generations of players, was transformed into a second lounge and reading room, gracefully restored to its 18th century magnificence with the Adam-style fireplace and decor shown off to better advantage. The former reading and television room was adapted to accommodate the billiard table. Some years later, in order to meet demand, a second billiard room was opened by reconstructing rooms on the ground floor.

The opening up of a formerly disused room above the cocktail bar, linking it to the main lounge by a fine wrought-iron spiral stairway, provided additional space on special occasions, and also a haunt for darts enthusiasts. A somewhat more discreet, and certainly more comfortable and better equipped, powder-room was another project undertaken. The secretary-treasurer, now coping with mounting administration, was given office accommodation which conveniently doubles as a Council Chamber.

All projects took place against a background of a burgeoning membership. In just over a decade it soared from 80 to 190, lawful provision having been made to raise the maximum permitted numbers to 200. Although revenue boomed subscriptions were kept deliberately in step with rising costs and in stages more than doubled to £10 in the same period. In 1973 an entry fee of £5 for new members was approved and four years later it was doubled.

This revitalisation from the mid-1960s onwards also embraced from the outset a fundamental departure that, arguably, has given the Club added respectability and acceptance in the community. The Club's doors had never been closed against the fair sex although their presence was confined in the very early days to the tennis court. Subsequently no garden party in the Thirties would have been a success without them and certainly the "Ladies' Nights" of the immediate post-war period were immensely popular.

However, it was not until the late 1950s that members increasingly sought to bring along their partners, although nothing in the constitution had prevented them from so doing in the earlier years. In 1965, moving with undue haste as some members believed, the Council approved the creation of a new category of membership, "Lady Associate", with an annual subscription of 10/6 and no voting rights. Male chauvinists (and there were many at the time) were dismayed but offered no opposition. They considered, mistakenly as it now transpires, the move would be inhibiting.

In nine months five lady associate members joined and within five years their ranks totalled 30. The Council endeavours to maintain a one-in-three ratio so that at a time of peak membership in 1977 the men numbered 190 with lady associates 61. In an age of Woman's Lib few, if any, of today's male members pass comment on the presence of women in what was once regarded as a wholly male bastion. Their arrival on the scene has contributed immeasurably to the life of the Club. Social gatherings with well-known guest artistes are frequently held in Boyndie House, and the days of the all-male Burns Supper are long gone.

The Club has also shed more of its property. The east wing, comprising No. 9 Boyndie Street, formed part of the original "tenement" and was disposed of to Dr. Frank J. Lees who has restored it to some of its former grandeur. The tennis court has become the Club car park and with the acquisition of additional ground for £3500 substantial

additional parking space is planned.

The far-reaching changes wrought in the past decade or so will remain a lasting tribute to successive Councils who, in the tradition of their predecessors, faced up to the challenge of the day. A greater latitude is given by today's members to their Council in administering the Club's affairs and the Council, in turn, adopts a broader interpretation of their remit than the founders. The guiding precept, as always, is the best interests of members.

Councils of the past favoured the summoning of extraordinary general meetings almost at the drop of a hat. They sought the advice and guidance of members on matters that with hindsight were bordering on the trivial. Many of the changes of the recent past, however, have stemmed from decisions of Councils who eschewed formal consultation with members, holding the firm belief they had their fingers on the pulse and were acting for the good of all.



James P. Walker - Club's longest-serving secretary

In this era of change and innovation the Club found in its principal official, Mr James P. Walker, a prudent and far-seeing secretary-treasurer who brought his own special gifts of tact and discretion to coping with the pressing demands of a new and younger generation of members. The annual meeting remains the major forum for members in debating Club affairs and electing office-bearers and Council. Three members of Council retire by rotation each year, a system of election first approved in 1969, some years after the practice was adopted of appointing a new president every two years.

A centenary, however, is not just an occasion to pause and reflect on past history, trials and tribulations, failures and triumphs. It is also a time to look forward. What then does the future hold for Banff Town and County Club?

The 100th anniversary of its founding coincides with a period of expansion and quiet prosperity for the Club. Rarely has this unique institution been in better health, with membership buoyant, finances in sound condition, superb comforts and amenities provided. Boyndie House, as a building, remains in a splendid state of repair, as stout as the Rock of Gibraltar and good for a further 100 years.

All this augurs well for the future. The Club will survive and remain a much valued institution by all associated with it so long as members and Councils in ensuing years continue to uphold the aims and aspirations that have guided their predecessors throughout the past ten decades.



### ***Club Presidents***

- 1881 - Thomas Gordon-Duff, of Park
- 1883 - John P. Gordon, of Cairnfield
- 1889 - Earl of Fife
- 1912 - William Charles Dawes, of Swordanes
- 1921 – Thomas Barton, Banff Castle (Hon. President 1926)
- 1926 - James Kerr
- 1946 - John C. Addison
- 1950 - John G. McPherson
- 1951 - William Peter
- 1959 - Alan Taylor
- 1961 - James A. Davidson
- 1962 - Maurice E. Galloway
- 1965 - Albert J. G. Bodie
- 1968 - Dr. Alexander S. McKenzie
- 1970 - Donald Fraser
- 1971 - William A. Brown
- 1973 - Henry Davidson
- 1975 – Bruce Tavendale
- 1977 – William Wilson
- 1979 - J. Forbes Law

## ***Club Secretaries***

- 1881 - James Morrison
- 1887 - Anthony Gordon
- 1888 - George A. Duncan
- 1896 - James Grant
- 1901 - George G. Simpson (First joint secretary-treasurer)
- 1909 - A. Forbes Spence
- 1913 - William S. Leask
- 1923 - Vincent Desson
- 1937 - George C. Bottomley
- 1940 - Walter H. Maxwell
- 1946 - Richard M. Webster
- 1953 - James A. Graham
- 1962 - A. Gilmour Young
- 1964 - James W. Smith
- 1966 - James P. Walker

### ***Club Keepers - Stewards***

- 1881 - Alexander Munro
- 1883 - William Mulligan
- 1912 - Peter Mitchell
- 1914 - James Sandison
- 1923 - John Kennedy
- 1924 - John Wood
- 1926 - Mrs Jane Dustan
- 1955 - James Wilson
- 1965 - John Milne
- 1970 - Henry Robb