

# **BIGGER THAN IT LOOKS, WITH GREAT BEDROOMS**

**The Royal Northern and University Club  
Aberdeen, Scotland**

by Lew Toulmin

We stayed at the Royal Northern and University Club in September 2017 for three nights. The club is located at 9 Albyn Place, a mile west of the center of Aberdeen.



## **HISTORY**

The Northern Club was founded in 1854 by 116 local leaders, landowners and gentry, including the Earl of Kintore, the Marquis of Huntly, Lords Hay and Haddo, the Provost (Mayor) of Aberdeen, Rear Admiral Leith and Major General Turner, and various officers of the Royal Aberdeenshire Highlanders.

In 1863 the club was placed at the disposal of Queen Victoria, who was visiting Aberdeen to unveil a statue of her beloved Prince Albert, who had died of typhoid two years before. In recognition of the club's hospitality, the Queen bestowed her patronage on the club, which then became the Royal Northern Club.

The club moved to its current location in 1955, and in 1979 it amalgamated with the University Club, which had been founded in 1889. The joined clubs retained the Albyn Place location.



The current patron of the club is Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh (photo at left taken at the club). The semi-retired but still hard-working Prince is the patron of over 800 institutions, charities and clubs. He recently visited the Royal Northern and University Club in August 2016.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

Full membership in the Club was limited to men only, from its founding until March 2017. At an extraordinary general meeting on March 11, the 200 members in attendance voted 86 percent in favor of admitting women. This vote followed numerous previous attempts to open up membership, all of which failed overwhelmingly. The key elements bringing about the change appeared to be the favorable attitude of the new chairman, Robert Smith, and the gradual fall in membership to just 544. Smith said that “among the legal, medical, accountancy and other professions in the business community, there are a number of ladies in senior posts who ... would enjoy the conviviality of the Club...” Within six months of the vote, 100 women had joined the club, including the local Member of Parliament, a City Councillor, a judge, various lawyers and doctors, and a woman nominated for a Nobel Prize. Thus the club has seen an 18 percent rise in membership in just half a year.

Nominees for membership require support from two existing members, each of whom must have been members for two years and each of whom knows the nominee personally. Only one of the supporters can come from the same profession as the nominee. A committee reviews the nomination for about six weeks, then publishes its decision.

The current entrance fee for a full, regular member is 300 pounds plus 20 percent VAT, and the annual subscription fee is 590 pounds plus 18.5 percent VAT. A “country membership” for members over 30 miles away is available for the usual entrance fee and an annual fee of only 320 pounds. A junior membership for persons aged 21-30 is on offer, with no entrance fee.

## **LOCATION, ARCHITECTURE, FACILITIES AND ACTIVITIES**



The Club is located on a street with similar detached small mansions, near a hospital, close to the city’s main shopping and commercial area of Union Street. From the outside the club looks like a distinguished but modest granite mansion, with perhaps six rooms total and about 3000 square feet (see photo). In fact the club extends for over 70 yards behind its front façade, and includes a substantial basement, so its total area exceeds 20,000 square feet.

The club amenities include 10 en-suite bedrooms, a bar (see photo), various beautiful meeting and function rooms, a billiards room, a formal dining room, a library (with only six books!), two royal portraits by Sir Joshua Reynolds, reciprocal relations with 165 clubs, good WiFi, and front and rear parking lots.



Club activities are numerous and include three monthly investment clubs, a hill walking group, golf section, curling society, snooker competition, book group, film and theater group, mahjong group, discussion forum, bridge group, “cherished car” group, gardening society, croquet society, chess club, photography group, sailing club, fishing group, boating club, and Scottish country dancing society. Whew!

The club has begun publishing a bi-annual magazine, which contains news on club affairs and a column rather like a humorous “Dear Abby.” The latest column describes the Club Suggestion Book as a “useful safety valve for letting off steam and hot air” and confidentially informs the reader that of the “400 suggestions made over the last 25 years, 4 have been acted upon”!

## **BEDROOMS**

The Royal Northern and University Club has 10 bedrooms, including one deluxe king room (see photo right), two king rooms, two double rooms, and five singles. None have air conditioning, but all have heating and a hot water bottle! All rooms have free TV, radio, WiFi, coffee-making facilities, and ironing board and iron.



Our bedroom was a king room, very attractive and fresh, with a grey and white décor, armoire, desk and sofa (see photo left). It was about 14 by 18 feet, quite spacious. The cost was 175 pounds per night (reciprocal rate), including a substantial “full Scottish” breakfast and the VAT charge.

Parking for reciprocals is free; there is a small lot in front of the club and a larger one behind, off an alley behind the local hospital.

### **DRESS CODE**

The dress code is coat and tie for men and the equivalent for women after 1130 in the morning. In the morning and on the way to/from the bedrooms, business casual is acceptable.

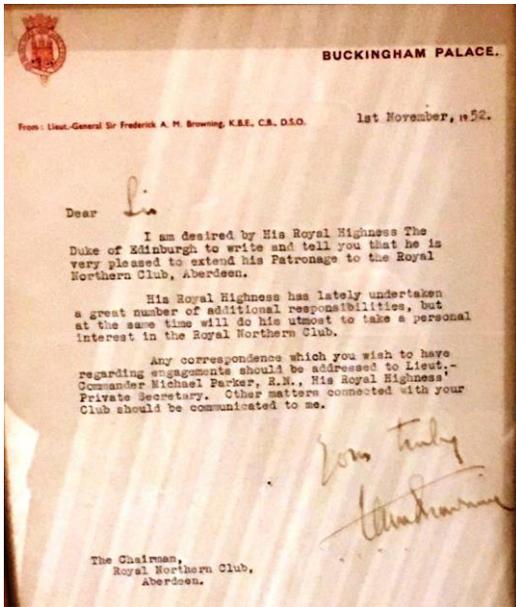
### **FOOD**

The club offers breakfast and lunch Monday through Friday, and dinner Monday through Saturday. We noted that the dining room was not busy at all unless there was a function in progress or a sub-group holding a meeting; this may reflect poorly on the quality of the food.

Our full Scottish breakfasts were quite good, with plenty of choice and friendly service.

Our one dinner consisted of seared Scottish scallops, with a mango-lime sauce (an “A-“ at 6.50 pounds); a 10 ounce ribeye steak (a “B-“, rather tough, 19 pounds); monkfish with pancetta (a “B” at 16 pounds); and a sticky toffee pudding with butterscotch sauce and vanilla ice cream (another “B” at 5 pounds).

More photos of the Royal Northern and University Club are shown below.



Letter from Buckingham Palace stating that HRH Prince Philip will be the Club patron



Grant of arms to the Club



Dining/function room with Reynolds portraits





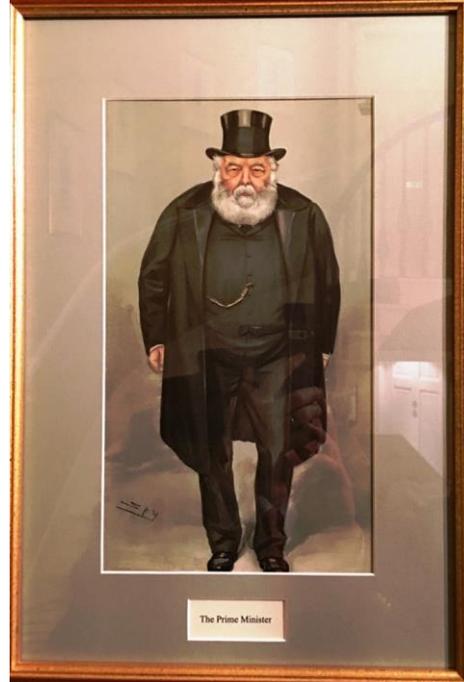
The Cherished Car group holds a show and rally



Curling is a club activity



The Club weighing chair



Sketches from *Spy* magazine decorate the Club



Dinner menu of the Club



King Richard the Lion-hearted holds aloft the charter he granted to Aberdeen; the statue is near the center of town.