

TWO BOMBS AND A HIDDEN DOME

The Carlton Club, London

by Lew Toulmin



We stayed at the Carlton Club for two nights in early June 2010. The Club is in a deceptively standard looking Georgian building in St. James Street, but then surprises with a gorgeous interior space featuring dramatic curving stairs and topped by an amazing large dome that is invisible from the street. It is in an excellent location just a few hundred yards from St. James Palace, and very close to terrific boutique shops on Jermyn Street. Bedroom rates are rather expensive during the week but acceptable on the weekend. Bedrooms have not generally had their decor re-done, but all do have air conditioning. Food at dinner was somewhat disappointing; breakfast was fine.



HISTORY

The Carlton Club was founded in 1832 and its first location was in premises supplied by Lord Kensington in Carlton Terrace, hence the name. Later the Club moved to Pall Mall, close to arch political rival the Reform Club. Unfortunately, this Carlton building was destroyed in the Blitz in World War II and the Carlton Club moved to the current location, formerly Arthur's Club, which had closed. The bomb narrowly missed the 40 Unionist MPs dining at the Club, miraculously injured no-one, left wine glasses standing full, yet demolished the building. Luckily,

the Club saved many distinguished portraits and paintings from the Pall Mall premises.

On 25 June 1990 the Carlton Club was bombed again, this time by the Provisional IRA, using a device left at the door of the current premises. Seven persons were injured and 82-year-old Lord Kaberry later died of his wounds. The Club was badly damaged but was repaired, and the stoic entry was made in the Club papers that "the wine stocks were unharmed."



Over the years, distinguished members of the Club have included Winston Churchill, Lord Randolph Churchill, Benjamin Disraeli, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, Sir Anthony Eden, Edward Heath, Rudyard Kipling, Harold Macmillan, John Major, and The Rt. Hon. Baroness Thatcher LG, OM, PC, FRS. Thatcher was made an “honorary man” in order to allow her, as Club President, into the men’s-only Club bar.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership in the Club is now open to men and women equally, and is based on letters of nomination from existing members. Women were allowed only as non-voting Associate Members until 2008. No specific requirements re publications or distinguished

service exist, but members must support the Conservative Party. One time entrance fees are currently set at 900 pounds. Annual fees range from a high of 1160 pounds for a local resident over 35 years of age, to 640 for a person permanently resident overseas. Peers of the realm pay 790 pounds. There are 1600 members. Harold Macmillan, member of the Carlton for 57 years, once noted that, “The ideal club should consist of 75 percent gentlemen and 25 percent crooks.” Hmmm....



LOCATION

The Club is located at 69 St. James Street, on the west side of the street. The Club is in an excellent position in “club land” near Sotheby’s, Christie’s, Hatchard’s Books, shopping on Jermyn Street (including Paxton and Whitfield, one of the best cheese shops in Britain), the Ritz Hotel, etc. The Club is closest to Green Park tube station on the Piccadilly Line.

FACILITIES

The Club has a gorgeous multi-storey interior court with a smashing dome with double curving stairs used in many weddings, and very large distinguished portraits. The dining room also has imposing, larger than life-sized portraits of the Duke of Wellington and other dignitaries and members. Under the dome there is a modern portrait of the Queen Mother with a register which she signed, and some good original art, including a bust of Baroness Thatcher. Visitors can purchase Carlton Club cuff links, ties and other souvenirs from the porter's lodge.



The dress code Monday through Friday is jacket and tie for men and dresses or trousers for women, although “smart casual” dress is allowed at breakfast. The Club has no activities and is very quiet on the weekend, and the dress code is relaxed then. We did see a lady wearing jeans on the weekend (“The Horror...the Horror...”).

There are 24 bedrooms at the Club, all air-conditioned. Our en suite twin bedroom

was long and narrow, about 9 x 17 feet. It had old wallpaper dating back perhaps to the 1960s. Most bedrooms may now be modernized, and increased in price; we paid 145 pounds for each weekend night. Food at dinner was B to B-, rather disappointing; breakfast was good on weekdays and a bit sparse on weekends. Service was fair.

