

# **FAB LIBRARY, TALLYRAND, ULYSSES AND PRINCE PHILIP, AND THE CHEAPEST DINNER IN CLUBLAND...**

## **...AND NO SMOKING IN THE SMOKING ROOM!**

### **THE TRAVELLERS CLUB, LONDON**

by Lew Toulmin



We visited the Travellers Club briefly in late June 2010 but were not able to stay in a bedroom, inspect one, or eat at the club. However, we were able to tour the Club's public rooms and obtain interesting information on bedroom rates that is not published on the Club website or available to the public, and hence have written up this partial report.

### **SUMMARY**

The Club is in historic Pall Mall, an excellent location in the heart of “club land,” between the Reform Club and the Athenaeum. Room rates are extremely reasonable on weekends, and acceptable during the week. Dinners are very reasonably priced if you eat early or late. Only some rooms are air-conditioned, ask for these. Staff are helpful, friendly, and even amusing.

### **HISTORY**

The Travellers Club was founded by Foreign Secretary Lord Castlereagh in 1819 in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars, to enable gentlemen to meet and entertain distinguished visitors from overseas. Early members included Tallyrand, the French ambassador to the Court of St. James from 1830 to 1834, five future Prime Ministers, and numerous British diplomats. The Club evolved into the club of choice for British foreign service officers and foreign ambassadors resident in London. The club is non-political.

The most distinguished recent member was perhaps Sir Wilfred Thesiger, CBE DSO FRAS, an extraordinary traveler, writer, early member of the famous Special Air Service regiment, and expert on the



Marsh Arabs of southern Iraq and the Empty Quarter of Saudi Arabia.

The clubhouse was built in 1829 along the lines of an Italian palazzo by Charles Barry, who subsequently designed the Houses of Parliament. The Club patron is the Duke of Edinburgh and Prince Charles is an honorary member. The club symbol is a bust of Ulysses.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

Membership is open to men only, and is based on letters of nomination from two existing members, attendance at a reception, and “a sufficiency of signatures in the Candidate’s Book.” Members must have traveled at least 500 miles from London, a requirement left over from the time when that was a major achievement. No specific requirements re publications or distinguished service are in evidence in the Club literature.

Annual fees reportedly are about 1000 pounds. Women may visit and use the club, but cannot enter two of the public rooms. In describing this situation, one of the staff said with a wry smile, “Big boys with little minds, what can I say?” (!)

## **LOCATION**

The Club is located at 106 Pall Mall, near the National Gallery, Sotheby’s, Piccadilly, the Institute of Directors (IOD), shopping on Jermyn Street, etc. Unfortunately, this street is currently undergoing extensive renovation, with noise and congestion affecting the Travellers Club and nearby Reform Club, Royal Automobile Club (RAC) and Athenaeum.



The Club is closest to Piccadilly Circus tube station (about 400 yards to the NNE of the Club). This station is on the Piccadilly Line with direct access (about 50 minutes) to all London Heathrow Airport terminals. From the Tube station there are two flights of stairs up to the street level, and one flight up to the entrance of the Club. So it is feasible to wheel or lug your luggage all the way to and from the airport. Wheelchair access in the public rooms of the Club is possible, using a wheelchair lift up from the street to the main level and second floor, but is impractical up to the bedrooms. There is a disabled lavatory accessible by lift. (Hmmm, that sentence didn’t come out quite right, did it? Oh, well, you know what I mean.)

## **FACILITIES**

The Club is smaller than the nearby Reform Club, RAC and Athenaeum, but the public rooms are lovely and feature original art by Sir Thomas Lawrence, RA FRS. The library

is deservedly called one of the loveliest libraries in London. Its holdings are very strong in travel and foreign affairs.



The ten public rooms include a bar, smoking room (these are the two male only preserves), two dining rooms, library and several meeting rooms. There is no gym, but the Club has access to an attractive adjacent garden.

Breakfast, lunch and dinner are offered. Prices for dinner main courses are reduced to about 9 to 10 pounds between 6 and 7 pm and 9 and 11 pm, a terrific bargain by London standards. The Club has reciprocal relations with about 100 other clubs around the world. There are rarely activities on the weekend. Reciprocal members may rent public rooms for parties, weddings and meetings, but resulting guests must abide by the dress code. Recent events held at the Club included a Summer Ball held jointly with the Athenaeum Club, a talk by George Band on the occasion of the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his leading the first British ascent of Kangchenjunga, and a private tour of Windsor Castle led by Field Marshall the Lord Bramall, KG GCB OBE MC.



## **DRESS CODE AND RULES**

The dress code is collared shirt, tie and jacket for men, and a vague equivalent for women. No denim or trainers (running shoes) are allowed. No cell phones may be used in the public rooms. There is no display of business papers in the public rooms, except the Inner Hall. There is no smoking in the Club -- most especially in the Smoking Room!

## **BED ROOM DESCRIPTION AND RATES**

There are 19 bedrooms at the Club, and staff advise that these are often booked several weeks in advance. They suggest calling early to "pencil in" a reservation, then refine it if necessary closer to the travel date. All bedrooms were re-decorated in the last 1-2 years, unusual for London clubs, and key in selecting a room. Only about half have air conditioning; ask for one of these. All rooms reportedly have color TV. Unfortunately, we were not able to inspect a bedroom since they were all full.

The rates listed below include VAT at 17.5 percent but not breakfast, which is 11.75 pounds per person for full English breakfast (offered Monday through Saturday) or 5.75 pounds for Continental breakfast (offered all days). Rates vary but include the following:

- A. Deluxe double en suite with AC: 192 pounds double occupancy during the week (Monday through Thursday) and 130 on the weekend; 147 for single occupancy during the week.
- B. Deluxe double with four poster bed, en suite with AC, 250 double occupancy during the week, 205 single occupancy during the week, and 180 double occupancy on the weekend.
- C. Double or twin en suite with AC: 167 double occupancy during the week, 138 single occupancy during the week, and a remarkably low 95 pounds double occupancy on the weekend.
- D. Double or twin rooms en suite with NO air conditioning: surprisingly, the same rate as C above.
- E. There are nine other bedrooms, all singles, some with bath but none with air conditioning, that have rates varying from a low of 50 pounds per night on the weekend to a high of 115 during the week.

Room cancellations must be done by 6:00 pm the night before.

NOTE: The Club is completely closed for ten days around Christmas and New Year's, for four days at Easter, and usually for three weekends in August, when no bedroom accommodation is offered on these weekends. Women are allowed to stay at the Club and use all the facilities except the two public rooms mentioned above.



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