

Ross S. Anderson

5 Marine Terrace,
Albany, W.A. 6330

Telephone ~~(098)~~ 41 2939

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Dear AINSKIE,

Enclosed is the copy of my address to
the Club dinner last Saturday, as we
discussed.

Ross Anderson

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KATANNING CLUB 90TH BIRTHDAY PARTY

(Sat. 28th Sept. 2002)

An address by Ross S Anderson

I must emphasise this is in no way a history of the Club. It is just some of my recollections of a bit over four decades of being a member of an organization I enjoyed very much.

Now I have a problem and it's all to do with my grey hair. I have discovered that grey hair drains away the memory. I've been meaning to get some hair dye but I keep forgetting. Anyway I thought I'd better do some research and discovered that Dr. Frederick House (my grandfathers' brother on my mothers side) was the first President and that Ross (grandfather) and brother Tom Anderson were vice Presidents on the first committee. Actually there were eight vice Presidents and no committeemen. A J. Johnston was the secretary-treasurer. I also found that Ross and Tom had contributed substantially toward the cost of the building. And here was me thinking that I'd been asked because of all the beer I'd consumed over the years, purely in the interests of the Club of course.

The Katanning Club was opened in 1914. It was formed in 1912 by a group of men of the district, who wanted a place where discussions could be held over a quiet drink and occasional social functions enjoyed. It was exclusively for men. After the process of planning, letting the contract and getting the all important liquor license, L.F. Kleeman completed this building at a cost of £1800. (In 1986 this would have been \$90,972 and possibly double that now. Not an excessive sum really.)

I became a member in 1951 when the Club was still truly a Men's Club, a place where like-minded men could gather and enjoy a drink and talk in relative privacy. It was always understood that you shouldn't discuss Religion or Business, but many business deals and arrangements were done here over the years.

The bar, now the 'Bird Cage', was the focal point in the Club. The reading room, now the bar, was a quiet place stocked with papers and periodicals laid out on a large table. In the fifty's there was a subscription to Man Magazine (pretty hot stuff then) and one of the members kept taking it almost as soon as it arrived. The Committee reckoned they knew who it was but couldn't catch him. He left town eventually but Man Magazine still kept disappearing so they had the wrong suspect. I don't think the culprit was ever discovered.

The library was available but not used very much, but the billiards room had the two good tables and was used a lot. The original members were more serious then and there used to be several who kept their own cues in metal containers at the clubhouse. Walter Lindrum Australian and World Billiards Champion and Bob Marshall, Australian Snooker Champion of the time both visited and demonstrated their considerable skills at different times; to a packed audience I might add.

The original large low light shades were rather reminiscent of those sinful old-time billiards saloons. When the tables were moved to this room some vandals on the committee did away with them and put in you-beaut modern lights up in the ceiling, which ruined the special character of the place. The lighting wasn't as good either.

The card room was used a lot, mostly for poker I think. I never did play. George used to say that some members gambled more than they could afford and did not pay their debts, which concerned the committee.

The storerooms and stewards quarters are at the back of course. The quarters may have been pretty good in 1914 but certainly after the Second World War they had fallen behind and were upgraded from time to time to attract people to the job, especially married stewards.

George told of a scheme hatched by Dr. Ted Pope I think, to have a bowling green on the Clive Street side of the Clubhouse. That is why it is levelled out like it is. As far as I know it was never finished and bowls were never played there. This happened between the wars. One could guess that lack of water was a major problem. Later in the 80s I think, a very enthusiastic bank manager had a scheme to build three units on that land and sell them to retiring members at a profit, but in the end I don't think the figures added up.

In the late 1940s George, with the support of my mother Marjorie, wanted to have the Marloo Ladies Club come to the Men's Club. His idea was that a separate suitable building be constructed out towards the defunct bowling green and the bowling green used for parking. It was to be connected by a passage to a common room over here where wives could enjoy a drink whilst waiting for their husbands. (How about that.) This was greeted with shock and horror by the male chauvinists and didn't get past first base. Much later this was broken down to the extent that ladies were allowed into the function room only, and should buy their own drinks. However some members would go in and buy a round of drinks for all who were there, which made it very difficult for younger members who couldn't afford to do that sort of thing.

In early 1985 the Marloo Club were advised of the impending redevelopment of what is now the Plaza and had to find a new home. They were able, after protracted discussions, to successfully negotiate an acceptance into the Club and were admitted as members. This was not without some difficulty and effectively did away with the Marloo as an entity along with its traditions and customs, which I think perhaps wasn't really necessary. The last dying protest of the male chauvinists so to speak. They moved in during July/August 1985 and brought enough money with them to build the kitchen. They also made curtains and generally made the premises less austere.

The Club has never been the same since; however those who may lament the breaking down of what was a wonderful institution are turning a blind eye to the rapid and inevitable changes in the society we live in. Still, I think us males are allowed a bit of nostalgia about the 'good old days'. Of course without the Marloo Ladies it is very likely the Club would have disappeared anyway.

The club was always extremely selective in who it let in as new members. This was a financial handicap to some extent but made for a very compatible membership. You had your membership form filled out and signed by your proposer and seconder and duly posted on the notice board. It didn't take much complaint to the proposer to have a name quietly taken down. This rarely happened though. After the required minimum time (about a month I think) a postal ballot of the members was conducted. It only took one blackball in 7 to exclude a prospective member. It was not a good system because some good people were excluded because of misunderstandings and apparently frivolous reasons. The change to a Committee ballot greatly improved the equity of the process.

The Annual Ladies Night was one of **the** events of the year. Early invitations were to members to bring their 'Wife and Two Ladies' if they wished. Gentlemen in dinner suits and ladies in the smartest ball gowns came to the Club. Drinks in the bar, dancing in the reading room (and later in the billiard room and then of course this function room). There were lavish suppers on the covered billiard tables. Portion of the veranda was closed in with hessian for extra space and a second bar installed to relieve congestion inside. The best thing was the live band

before transistors had been invented. You could actually talk to your partner. The hardest task of the evening fell to the President and his wife and the Secretary who greeted all the guests as they came in. My mother found it a bit wearing to stand in line for hour or so while everyone arrived.

The Club has had some real characters among its members over the years. There were some regulars who spent Saturday afternoons betting on racehorses and they would arrive around midday from work. They were excellent company as long as you kept quiet while the races were being called and runners and scratchings read out on the radio. The music was good too.

'Wingy' Dutton (who travelled for International Harvester) would come in complaining of his excesses of Friday night and lie down on a small sofa in the corner. After a couple of beers he revived and soldiered on for the whole afternoon.

Alec Hamilton was the manager for Dalgety's and very keen on his betting. One day he and Peter Balston had a sharp difference of opinion and one invited the other to come out to the small patch of lawn out from the front door and settle the matter. No one took much notice although Phil Perry the steward was most concerned they would damage themselves. Sure enough with no audience not a blow was struck and they came back in a few minutes later better friends than ever.

Phil Taylor was another follower of horses. He was a very successful seller of Fords for Katanning Stock & Trading. Eventually he bought a caravan park in Carnarvon and was reported as being a different and happier man.

The betting was possible because of an arrangement with Arthur Norrish the SP bookie in Katanning at that time. The punters would place their bets with the steward who phoned them through to Arthur. I think Phil used to carry the odd bet himself when he thought a real loser was backed. I don't know if he ever had to pay out. Starting Price betting wasn't exactly legal but nobody seemed to mind much. This SP arrangement went back for decades and at one stage just after the war in about 1947 Dr. Ted Pope came home from the Club and announced that he was off to England on the proceeds of a good win on the horses. One Police Sergeant, of whom there are a number tales, used to visit on Xmas Eve and was given a bottle of whiskey as a present. This seemed to smooth the way for the club in minor matters.

Peter Balston farmed on the edge of town at St. Claire, 71 Adam Street. He was very well read and interesting company. Unfortunately his hobbyhorse was Land Tax on which he would expound at great length after reaching a certain stage of inebriation. The trick was slip out of the group and not to be left alone with Peter. Years ago (1950s) the Road Board decided to put a 'silent policeman' in the offset intersection of Austral Terrace and Clive Street, in the interests of what we now call road safety. It was basically a 44-gallon drum filled with concrete and painted yellow, which the likely lads of the town relocated one New Years Eve. Bill Broughton, the Road Board Secretary, wasn't to be beaten so the next one was a solid square concrete block with more in the ground than was sticking out. Late one evening Peter, who had imbibed well but not wisely, was carefully driving his way home when he made a slight miscalculation and ran into it head on fair and square in the middle. Bill's new silent cop didn't budge and neither would Peter's car after that treatment. So he prudently and quickly walked away home, and got clean away with it.

Jack Galloway was Elders manager in Katanning, very popular and well known throughout the state. He was a regular, often on his way home from the hotel where a lot of his business was done. He was one of the best stock agents in the State and had a prodigious capacity for beer. The only way you could tell how much he had had was by the length and number of

words he was using. He always conveyed a precise meaning although some people didn't appreciate it, probably because they didn't understand him.

I think my favourite times at the Club were on weekday evenings. Any excuse to come to town about half past four, a few nails or a couple of bolts and nuts would do, vital for the farm of course. My father George was the same only more regular than me. You could almost bet on Dr. Christie in the corner of the bar, George of course, Bill Synott (owner of the Great Southern Herald), Eric Hams (accountant and Club Secretary), Dick Old (Caltex), and two or three others at random. The topic of the day and other things would be discussed in leisurely fashion. Bill always had pretty good and accurate information about what was going on. We mostly all went home about 6 or 6.30pm.

I recall calling to the Club one Saturday afternoon to get a packet of cigarettes (First Lord – How's that for memory) and finding Kingsley James and a few others wetting the head of Kingsley's first newborn son. I had a bit of a cold so had a couple whiskeys and fully intended to leave them to it. However it developed into a great party, not all of which I remember properly. Burrige the steward must have gone off for some tea and Brien the committeeman present took over. Eventually Burrige came back and just as he came in the door Brien was wiping the bar top with a large sweeping action and accidentally let the sopping rag go. The steward was a small man and copped it right in the face. He turned on his heel and we didn't see him again that evening. Nobody seemed to take much notice and I don't think Brien knew he'd done it at the time. Later I remember climbing on the mantle shelf in the corner and making an impassioned and great oration, but for the life of me can't remember what about.

Then Kingsley decided he'd better go and visit Jill and his son. Climbed into his truck, carefully reversed the corner of the tray through the back window of Brien's car and went off, quite oblivious to the accident. We soldiered on and not much later Kingsley returned. (I don't think he was all that welcome at the hospital.) We decided to lock him out and not being able to open either door demanded entry. He couldn't have liked our reply so he charged the door and broke the lock out. I seem to recall a rather terse letter from the Committee about behaviour in the Club.

It wasn't the only letter I received. It was during the few months the Club had its second one-armed bandit (the first one dates back to the 1920s I think. Actually there are two of these early poker machines). Pops was pregnant with Suzy so we didn't go to a ball at the Army Drill Hall. (This was July or August 1956.) Max Richardson, the 'Merchant Prince', and I found ourselves alone at the club, a poker machine players dream. We pushed shillings into the brute of a thing like they were going out of fashion – with no result of course. Eventually Max said 'I know how to make this thing pay', so I helped him turn it upside down. Well it payed all right and it took us a couple of hours to get it all back in, what with the minor payouts that came along. Max was all for doing it again but I'd had enough, so he tipped it upside down by himself, not a mean feat – it's a wonder he didn't drop it. This time however some of the bobs were caught in the mechanism. The Committee were extremely displeased and said so in plain terms in our official letters. We should have listened to the steward's (Phil Perry) advice not to do it the first place.

One thing the poker machine did was provide a good cash flow, which enabled the addition of the function room and fitting out of the reading room as the bar. However it was a most undesirable and antisocial thing and a wise decision by Bert Hawk's government to ban them.

The bandit provided a rare piece of prosperity, but George used to say the Club had always struggled a bit to pay its way, which may be of some comfort to the present committee although the problems now are somewhat different to those of the past.

George used to say the Committee should arrange to have a couple of cars parked outside so any member driving past would call in the belief that he wouldn't be on his own.

In the 50s George Clark was the very popular Mine Host at the Katanning Hotel and it was the place to meet on Friday afternoons even though drinks were slightly cheaper at the Club. It was felt the club suffered a bit because some members went there first (the Club opened at 5pm) and often didn't continue on to the Club.

Another thing that was done to reduce costs was import barrels of whisky, bottle it here and sell it as Club whisky. I don't know how good it was, because it happened before WW II.

The first steward I knew when I was accepted into the Club in 1951 was a man called Burrige, ex Royal Navy I think, who did an impeccable job. In those days the formalities were observed and he was addressed as Steward or Burrige and you never bought him a drink. He just might accept one on a Christmas Eve. Another rule for stewards was that they should never join in conversation with members. The only exception was when only one member was present.

There was a good overtime payment system for stewards too. At the discretion of the steward members who wished to continue on past closing at 11pm could put in 2/- each for the first hour, then 4/- for the second hour and so on which, with half a dozen or so present, was a lot better than it sounds now because then you could buy a 'king brown' for 1/6 or 2/-.

The next steward I recall was Phil Perry. We started moving with the times while Phil was there and by the time he left he was Phil to the members, but still wisely did not accept a drink too often.

Another knockabout character was Norm Heberle. He had a pet kangaroo in the times when the meatworks were being built which he sometimes brought into the bar for entertainment in the later hours of the evening. He was an obliging and cheerful person. Eventually Dudley Rowland (the meatworks originator) gave him a job managing a farm down near Gnowangerup.

The meatworks management were a great boost to the Club and were regular users of the facilities. There was an engineer in charge of design and building the works who had very smart little Alfa Romeo car. On this day he parked it where I usually parked in the shadow of the hedge. Eager for a beer I swung the Falcon ute in and backed straight into it. The old farm ute hardly had a mark on it, but the Alfa wouldn't go any more. When I went in and told him I'd "Billy Connelly'd" his car he wasn't very happy. We never seemed to get on very well after that.

Back to the stewards. After Norm I think we had Barry Edwards. He sold Holdens for Marshall Motors. He had a great ambition to own a hotel; all he lacked was a bit of capital. I've no doubt I wasn't the only member he approached to be a silent partner. I hope he made it.

Later we had Viv Evans and his wife Beryl. Viv was very good at the job and it coincided with a fundamental change in the Club's history. They began putting on excellent dinners at the Club and were always cheerful and helpful towards members and must have eased the

transition of the Marloo ladies to the Club. Viv had a calm and measured demeanour and had a fund of stories on all sorts of subjects. The contraction of the Club brought about by drink - driving laws and a changing society meant that his services could no longer be retained and he retired in Katanning to sell Amway products and run Probis.

There have been many other stewards over the last 90 years of course.

The last thing I'd like to mention is the attitude towards drinking that prevailed in the Club membership. No one came with the sole purpose getting drunk; rather you came to enjoy the company and a few drinks during the course of the evening. Naturally this lead to some excesses at times but the other strong ethos prevailing was that you should be able to hold your drink. Those who couldn't or wouldn't were held in some contempt, which was a very strong incentive to behave yourself even when you'd had a few too many. Bad incidents were almost non-existent even though there were some mighty drinkers about.

The Club has made a very positive influence on the town by the nature of its membership and the social and business contribution of the members. I hope it will continue in the years to come.