

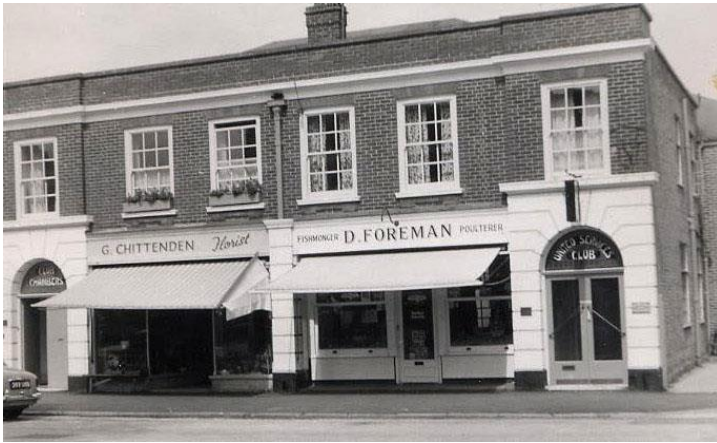
The UNITED SERVICES CLUB

Old Comrades Club

The club was originally founded soon after the First World War by Henry Eyre Jeston, who was joint Headmaster of Grenham House Boys School, Grenham Road, Birchington. The exact date of the club's inauguration is not known. The club began its life meeting in a room over the Powell Arms under the name of the "Old Comrades Club". It was a purely local enterprise and has remained totally independent ever since. Henry Jeston was made its President from the very beginning of its inception and remained so until his death.

United Services Club

The building which now houses the United Services Club was built in Station Road for the club 1925-26 and is listed under this title from the beginning of its



entries in Kelly's directories. At what stage it changed its name from Old Comrades to United Services is not known. There was an old Minute Book in the club, covering seventy years of its history, which we are hoping will be rediscovered in the near future. It was begun in the late 1920s, probably when the club was renamed and took over its present premises.

Denys Jeston - President

When Henry Jeston died in 1953, aged 77, his son Denys Jeston took over from his father's role as President of the Club and continued until his first wife Eve died in the 1960s or early 1970s. At this point Bill Barnes took over the Presidency. When Denys married Mary, his second wife, he was asked to resume his old role, which he did and remained so until bad health finally forced him to give up in about 1999. Denys died in 2001.

Membership and the extension

A large extension was added at the rear of the premises in the 1970s, greatly enlarging the possible membership of the Club. From earliest times free membership of the Club has been offered to all ex-servicemen. The front bar of the Club and the snooker area was only open to men at this period.



Ladies had to enter through the rear of the premises. They could not become full members at this time, but wives were allowed to become Associate Members. The front of the Club is in the right hand end of the block in this photo and butted up against the entrance to Woodford House School. Over the door of the club are the words "UNITED SERVICES CLUB".

The central entrance has the words "CLUB CHAMBERS" inserted into the glass over the door. This one led up to rooms above, used during the 1960s by Dr Bowie for his surgery premises.

The Birchington WAR SHRINE Boards

During the First World War, every parish and town in England erected "War Shrines". These consisted of wooden boards on which the names of those missing, killed or taken prisoner were noted. Initially, our own boards stood in All Saints' Church porch and additional names were added as the casualties were notified to the local community. At the end of the war the names from the boards were transferred onto local document lists, which were used for the inscriptions on the war memorials being erected all over the country. The War Shrines were no longer needed, but they had been the focus of much anguish for four long years and had taken on a significance of their own. The fate of the War Shrines varied from parish to parish, but most were kept and venerated in some way for a number of years.

The two boards in Birchington were eventually taken down to the Untied Services Club and placed in the entrance lobby, where they remained for many years. When the extension of the Club premises was undertaken in the 1970s, the boards were taken down and it is thought that they were placed over the top of the "office" section. This is now being investigated.

Social Activities of the Club

In the period immediately after the Second World War, the Club used to run outings each year for its members and their families. There would be six or seven coaches in any one trip. Sadly, nowadays they find it difficult to fill even one coach. This is almost certainly due in part to the increased number of car owners, who can now visit almost anywhere in the South of England for the day under their own power.

Club Membership

The membership of the Club is as high, or even higher, than in the past. This is partly due to the fact that ladies can now become members in their own right. It is also due to the fact that the beer in the Club is considerably cheaper than in any of the pubs in the village, mainly because it is still a private members' club and not open to the general public.

Many of the present members are new to the village and the long traditions of service to the Club are not part of their background. This means that their loyalty is often limited to their own family and close friends. The traditions of families like 'Bunny' Hudson's are no longer available to the Club. It is much harder to get people to work on the Committee that runs the Club, which may one day possibly put the Club in jeopardy. Because it is privately run and therefore has no outside backers supporting its finances, it is vital that its membership keeps up its role of master-minding the whole enterprise.

Jennie Burgess - with many thanks to Alan Hollands of 37 Park Lane, (845 403) who kindly allowed me to interview him. June 2005