

YOUR OWN KILT AND RACEHORSE

THE CALEDONIAN CLUB, BELGRAVIA,
LONDON

by

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SUMMARY

We stayed at the Caledonian Club for three nights in early June 2010. The Club is in an excellent location in Belgravia just NE of Belgrave Square. Room rates are perhaps the lowest among similar clubs in London for the good accommodation provided, and the rooms are simple but new, comfortable and a decent size. The staff are very friendly and helpful, décor in the public rooms is lovely, and the food varies from excellent to average.

HISTORY

The Caledonian Club was founded in 1891 and re-formed in 1917 by the Marquis of Tullibardine. Its goal is to be the representative club for Scots in London, a sort of Scottish embassy. The current clubhouse in Halkin Street is named after Halkin Castle, the Duke of Westminster's seat in Flintshire. The Duke still retains the freehold on the Club property, as he does on most of Mayfair and Belgravia. (He also owns the land under the US Embassy.) In 2006 a new Club wing was opened by the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership is open to gentlemen recommended by two members. The nominee must be of Scottish descent (at least a grandparent), or be the son of a member, or have "closest association with Scotland." (*sic*; see below.) Lady associate members (apparently without voting rights) must have at least a Scottish grandparent or parent, or a "closest association with Scotland." This latter phrase does not just mean the nominee has eaten haggis once on a dare, but rather that he/she was born in Scotland, owns land there, does business there, was educated there, has married a Scot, or has played a significant role in the life of Scotland. Geographical categories of membership include town, country and overseas.

The full entry fee is reportedly 750 pounds and the annual subscription is 950. Junior membership is encouraged by waiving the entrance fee and one year's subscription for



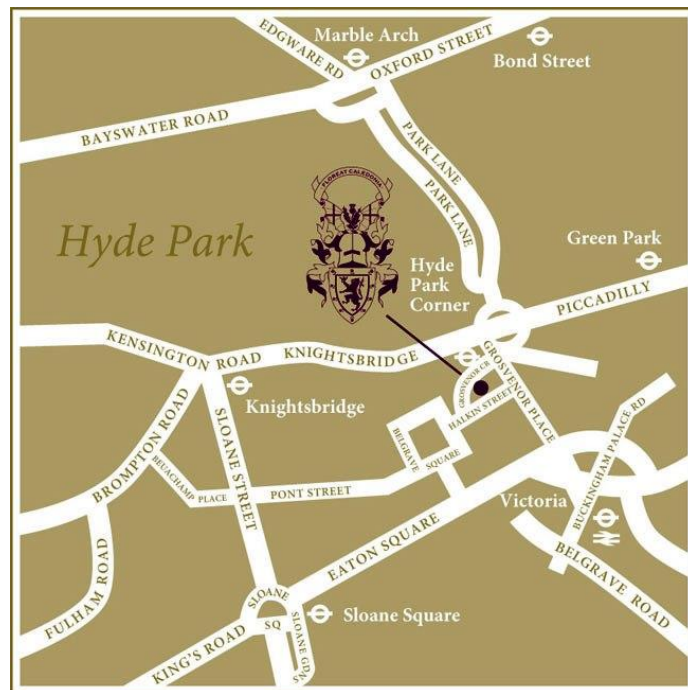
members 18-25, waiving the entrance fee and having a reduced annual fee for members 25-30, and waiving the entrance fee for members 30 to 35. A number of Scottish MPs and political leaders have been and are members.

APPROACHING THE CLUB

The friendly staff did not demand a copy upon entry of our faxed introduction letter. You can be casually dressed upon first entering, departing for casual activities, and on weekends. Remarkably, the rules actually state that you can wear jeans or trainers (running shoes) when going to and from the bedrooms! The porter on duty will check your reservation and direct to a small elevator through the main entry hall and down a large hallway. No temporary membership card will be issued, but room keys are provided. Upon departing, cabs can be readily hailed in Belgrave Square, about 200 feet away.

LOCATION

The Club is located at number 8 on the north side of Halkin Street, a small quiet street leading southwest into Belgrave Square and northeast into busy Grosvenor Place. There are ten embassies and High Commissions within a few hundred yards of the Club. Note that Belgravia is 7/10th of a mile west of the “club land” area of St. James, and hence does not have immediate access to Jermyn Street, Piccadilly, etc., and is rather residential. But the Club is only 3/10th of a mile east of very high end shopping on Sloane Street (all the big glitzy names), and is about 4/10th of a mile east of Harrod’s. There is a Barclay’s Bank with ATM on West Halkin Street just west of Belgrave Square, and a nice Waitrose supermarket, a bakery, and cafes in Motcomb Street, just north of West Halkin Street.



The nearest Tube station is Hyde Park Corner, three short blocks to the north. 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 a couple of flights of stairs and some slightly confusing tunnels to get up to the street level, and a couple of steps up to the entrance of the Club. So it is feasible to wheel or carry your luggage all the way to and from the airport. Wheelchair access once inside the Club is possibly do-able.

FACILITIES

The Club is a large, 80-foot wide Georgian townhouse with beautiful but modest sized public rooms, done in traditional style with a Scottish twist. Public rooms include a reception hall with dramatic curving staircase and a life-sized portrait of the Queen, library, dining room, outdoor terrace, well-appointed snooker room,

members lounge and smoking lounge. Both of these latter are for males only. There is a 24x7 computer room with two computers with Internet access, in the basement. There is no gym in the Club, but for five pounds paid to the concierge you can visit a nearby cooperating gym with a three lane pool.



There are some rather unique Scottish services available. A choice of Scottish dance callers and ceilidh bands is on offer, including the interestingly named band Kafoozalum. A Scots tailor comes to the club on the first Thursday of each month to fit members and visitors with kilts. And the concierge can provide a selection of bagpipers on short notice, if you are in dire need. One of these was formerly the Piper to the Queen Mother.

The Club has over 50 reciprocal clubs around the world, a rather modest number. The Club concierge can obtain tickets, possibly at a discount, for upcoming events such as Trooping the Colour, if given enough notice. There are three major Club events per year, the Burns Supper, St. Andrews Day and the Summer Ball.



The Club has various allied societies and sub-groups, including the Racing Society, which owns a four-year-old race horse named "Strathcal." So far the bay gelding has started 15 times on the flat and won three times, with several seconds and thirds – a good record. Members can buy shares in the horse or become Society supporters. In either case they are notified of upcoming races and when attending can use the owners' and trainers' facilities.

DRESS CODE AND RULES

The dress code Monday through Friday for men is jacket and tie, with vague equivalent for women. Smart casual dress is desired on the weekends and during the breakfast period up until 9:30 am. Jeans, shorts or trainers are not allowed, except in transiting to the bedrooms. There is no display of business papers in the public rooms, except the library, and no use of mobile phones.

BED ROOM DESCRIPTION

There are 39 bedrooms at the Club, all en suite. Our twin bedroom was number 36 on the top, third floor of the new wing, accessible by elevator. It was about 10 x 15 feet, fairly large by London standards. It had two comfortable twin beds, one modest sized window overlooking a mews, small closet, very small built-in bureau, and a writing desk. The décor was simple but comfortable, and the structure, paint and fixtures were only four years old. The en suite bathroom was modern and attractive. There was a TV with only about five channels, and an individual air-conditioning/heating unit. We could never get the AC to actually cool, despite complaints to staff. There was no room safe. There is broadband WiFi in the bedrooms. Note that most but not all rooms have air conditioning, so you should request this in contacting the Club.



BED ROOM RATES

Our twin room en suite with two occupants was 160 pounds during the week, including full Scottish breakfast and VAT at 17.5 percent. This rate drops to 130 pounds on the weekend, and remarkably, still includes a full Scottish breakfast, not a continental breakfast as in most London clubs. A single room during the week is 130 pounds, and 180 pounds for a junior suite. We felt that the twin/double en suite rate of 160 during the week, including VAT and full breakfast, was the best deal of the numerous London reciprocal clubs we surveyed. The Club accepts all major credit cards except Diners, and charges a one pound card transaction fee upon departure.

FOOD

The included full “Scottish breakfast” at the Club was very good, and we gave it an “A.” It featured eggs, bacon (Canadian bacon), Scottish sausage, kippers, fruit, toast, pastries, tea or coffee, etc.

Dinner starters were priced from 3.75 to 8 pounds and mains at 9.50 to 18.00, with most mains around 14.00. Lunch starters were also 3.75 to 8 pounds but mains were 9.50 to

15.00, with most at 12.00 pounds. These prices are quite reasonable by London standards.

For dinner, I had a house liver pate with a wine reduction sauce to start, 5 pounds, which I gave an "A-," very enjoyable. For a main course I had a fricassee of wild mushrooms and rice with a cream sauce, 11 pounds, another solid "A-." My dessert was a custard with strawberry sorbet on a biscuit, with a small glass of Spanish sherry, 7 pounds, only a "B-." My wife had a main of Scottish salmon over green beans, 14 pounds; the fish was rather dry and the potatoes rather tasteless, hence a "B-" or worse. Her dessert was a summer berry pudding on bread with a raspberry puree and clotted cream, 5 pounds, only a "B."

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