

AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 DAYS – CHECK THAT A.C.

THE REFORM CLUB, LONDON

by

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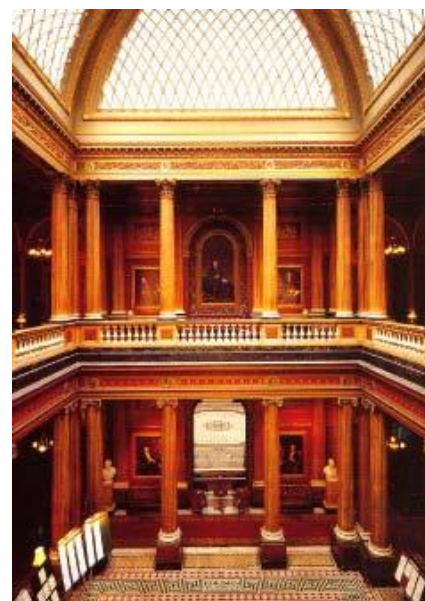
We stayed at the Reform Club for two nights in late June 2010 and have written up a full report.

SUMMARY

The Club is in a beautiful building in historic Pall Mall, a super location just a few hundred yards from St. James Palace. Room rates are acceptable if not cheap. Visitors should avoid the non-air-conditioned second floor sleeping rooms during warm weather, and request the third floor instead. This newly-installed floor has no windows but does have a modern AC system.

HISTORY

The Reform Club was founded in 1836 and the current building was designed in 1841 by Charles Barry, one of the leading architects of the day, as a large Italian-style palace based on Palazzo Farnese by Michelangelo. Membership was originally limited to liberal (and Liberal) supporters of the Great Reform Act of 1832, and new members had to sign a document attesting their support, hence the name of the Club. The Club is no longer politically affiliated. Famous members have included Winston Churchill, E.M. Forster, Henry James, Lord Palmerston, William Makepeace Thackeray, Arthur Conan Doyle, David Lloyd George and H.G. Wells. These and other member's pictures line the walls of the ground floor.



I was surprised and pleased to find a picture of a distinguished relative there too. William Lygon, KG, KCMG, CB, KStJ, PC, seventh Earl of Beauchamp, was a Cabinet member and sword-bearer to the King at his coronation. Unfortunately, as documented in *Madresfield, the Real Brideshead* by Jane Mulvagh, he was forced to flee the country (and resigned the Club) in 1931 to avoid prosecution for homosexual activities. He was my eighth cousin once removed through the Ligon/Lygon connection, and he was the inspiration for Lord Marchmain, the head of the Flyte family in *Brideshead Revisited* by Evelyn Waugh.



In literature, the Club is most famously the location from which Professor Phileas Fogg departed and arrived on his fictional trip *Around the World in 80 Days* in the 1873 Jules Verne novel, after making the huge 20,000 pound wager at the Club that he could succeed in this impossible task. Surprisingly, Jules Verne never visited the Reform Club, and based his description of the “mosaic flooring, twenty red porphyry columns, succulent stores and grave waiters” on secondary accounts.



MEMBERSHIP

Membership is open to men and women equally, and is based on letters of nomination from existing members. Membership to women was opened in 1981, the first such opening among British clubs. No specific requirements re publications or distinguished service are in evidence in the Club literature. There are 2700 members, including 500 overseas members and 400 women. One time entrance fees are currently set at 1500 British pounds for UK residents and 750 for overseas residents. Annual fees range from a high of 1200 pounds for a UK resident to 800 for a North American resident, down to just 300 for a UK resident aged 18-22.

APPROACHING THE CLUB

It is advisable to have a copy of your faxed introduction letter with you when first entering the Club. You can be casually dressed upon first entering. The porter on duty will check your reservation and direct you up a tiny elevator (dating back to 1896) behind the porter's cubicle. No temporary membership card will be issued, and no room keys are available.(!)

LOCATION

The Club is located at 104 Pall Mall, a street known for its parades and terrific location near the National Gallery, Sotheby's, the Institute of Directors (IOD), shopping on Jermyn Street (including Paxton and Whitfield, one of the best cheese shops in Britain), etc., etc. Unfortunately, this street is currently undergoing extensive renovation, with noise and congestion affecting the Reform Club and adjacent Travellers Club and Royal Automobile Club (RAC). The double glazing of the Reform Club's windows does keep out almost all the noise. 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 inside the Club is impractical.

FACILITIES

The Club has a lovely multi-storey interior court roofed with glass, with imposing classical features and columns, dark wooden walls and numerous large portraits of members. This court was undergoing renovation one side at a time when we were there, which detracted from the atmosphere. The dining room is very large (about 120 feet long) and attractive, with views out over the Club's garden. The library is excellent, with 75,000+ volumes, and there is a card room, billiards room, TV room and a silence-only Study Room and Writing Room. When we visited there was an extensive exhibition on William Gladstone, famous Prime Minister and member of the Club, including the actual "Gladstone bag" that he carried – much smaller than the current version. The atmosphere in the Club is rather old school, and one feels that one should whisper at all times.



DRESS CODE AND RULES

The dress code is rigid and must be adhered to even at breakfast (7:30 to 9:45 am). This includes collared shirt and tie and jacket for men, although men may remove the jacket after sitting down for breakfast. (!) The dress code is relaxed on weekends, after Saturday breakfast. Not allowed at any time are jeans, trainers (running shoes), denim, T-shirts, hiking boots, deck shoes, flip flops, leisure wear

or jodhpurs. Women should be suitably attired, but standards appear vague. (Men and women can get away with casual dress while entering and leaving the building via the small elevator behind the porter's lodge cubicle.) No cell phones may be used in the public rooms. The Club has no activities on the weekend. There is no display of business papers or "open discussion of commercial business" in the public rooms. Under the rules, "No games of hazard are allowed, nor shall dice be used on the Club premises." (Damn!)

BED ROOM DESCRIPTION

There are 47 bedrooms at the Club. Our bedroom was number 213 on the second floor. It was one of the largest bedrooms, at 15.5 x 16.5 feet, and is often requested by visiting Americans, since it is very large by London standards. It had two comfortable twin beds, one large double glazed window, fireplace and mantle, wall to wall blue carpeting, and the walls were painted



Wedgewood blue with ivory and white trim. The ceiling was white. There was some flaking paint in the small foyer, but overall the décor was in good shape and appeared to have been re-done in the last 3-4 years. There was a dresser, armoire, closet, two sitting chairs and a desk and bedside tables. The room had a large attached bathroom, about 5 x 12 feet, with overhead shower but no tub. Wheelchair access in this bathroom would be very poor, due to a step up to the shower. There are no TVs, radios, room safes, or keys in any of the sleeping rooms. There was no air-conditioning in this or any second floor bedroom. There was an upright tower fan, but this was ineffective. We would not recommend this or any second floor room in late June or in July or August. We inspected two bedrooms on the new third floor. These are only about 2 years old, and have individual AC systems. They do not have windows, only skylights, and are small but attractively decorated. Most have bathrooms en suite but three do not. There are also several bedrooms in the partially-below-ground floor which we did not inspect.

BED ROOM RATES

Rates vary but include the following: A. Single bedroom not en suite: 80 pounds base rate per night for the room, plus 30 pounds for non-member reciprocal supplement,

equals 110 pounds. Add 15 pounds for an en suite single room. B. Double bedroom, not en suite: base rate of 125 pounds plus 30 pound supplement per person, equals 185 for a couple. Add 10 pounds for en suite, equals 195 for a couple. The base rate (but not the supplement) is reduced by 20 percent on Saturday nights and 15 percent on Sunday nights. Rates include VAT and full or continental breakfast except on Sundays, when there is no service. We felt that these rates were no bargain, but were acceptable when compared to the mostly luxury hotels in the area, with rates of 30 to 50 percent higher, although the hotels have modern AC, TV, and other services. The Reform rates were also in the middle range of other London clubs. The Club accepts Visa and MasterCard but not AMEX or Diners Club. There is a 48 hour cancellation policy. Since bedrooms vary by quality, size, view and AC, and the best ones are known and sell out quickly, it is best to call the club and discuss your requirements several weeks in advance, if possible. August is slow at the Club and room availability is high then.

FOOD

We did not eat dinner or lunch at the Club. Breakfast, either full or Continental, was included in the bedroom rate. Breakfast was good, typical English with choices of bacon (Canadian bacon), mushrooms, grilled tomatoes, all kinds of eggs, two types of sausage, etc., and was ordered a la carte by paper slip.

Although Jules Verne described the waiters as “grave,” ours seemed to mutter a lot under his breath and acted rather oddly. The large breakfast/dining room was open to the garden via large windows, and hence was rather hot. Tipping of staff is not allowed.

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