



# CONVIVIAL COMPANIONSHIP

## The Savile Club, London

by Lew Toulmin

We stayed at the Savile Club in Mayfair for two nights in August 2017. The club is housed in a large double townhouse in Mayfair, near Claridge's Hotel, at 69 Brook Street.

This is a traditional men's club, with a distinguished membership drawing on the arts, writing, music and other professions.

### HISTORY

The Savile Club began life in 1868 as the New Club, but changed its name to the Savile Club when it moved to Savile Row in Mayfair in 1871. Moving again to an excellent site overlooking Green Park, the club was forced to move yet again in 1927 when its building virtually collapsed due to construction works next door.



The final and current site, at 69 and 71 Brooke Street, about three blocks east of the soon-to-be-moved US Embassy, was purchased from the daughter of "Lou-lou" Lewis Harcourt, 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount Harcourt. He was a Liberal Secretary of State for the Colonies who had committed suicide when his paedophilia was about to be publicly exposed. The house had been lavishly redecorated and renovated in two waves between 1892 and 1920 by the owners, who were linked to the famous Morgan banking family of the USA.

### MEMBERSHIP

Full membership in the Club is still restricted to men, but there are no parts of the club that are closed to women, and female reciprocal members may stay, come and go freely.

Membership reflects the various geographical moves the club has made, especially the recent location near broadcasting and publishing firms. The key quality for membership is conviviality and the ability to make interesting conversation, reflecting the club's motto of "Solidaditas Convivium" or "convivial companionship." There is no "black ball" system, but proposed new members must have the unanimous support of the membership committee. If this is not obtained in three attempts, the applicant is rejected. There are about 3000 members, a very substantial number, but only about 500 are active.



Distinguished members have included actors Ralph Richardson and Edward Fox, illustrator Max Beerbohm, broadcast personalities Stephen Fry and Sir Huw Wheldon, film star Charlie Chaplin, military and intelligence historian M.R.D. Foot, composers Edward Elgar and Andrew Lloyd Webber, Prime Minister Arthur Balfour, the "father of nuclear physics" Ernest Rutherford, scientist Lord Kelvin, and writers Richard Adams, John le Carre, William Golding, Winston Graham, Thomas Hardy, H. Rider Haggard, Henry James, Rudyard Kipling, A.A. Milne, J. B. Priestley, Robert Louis Stephenson, Evelyn Waugh, H.G. Wells and W. B. Yeats. T.E. Lawrence "of Arabia" was a temporary member in 1919. What a list!

Members have won numerous awards, some of which are on display, including an Oscar and a British Film Academy Award.



Membership rates are quite low for young members and about standard for older members. The joining fee is a moderate 350 pounds for members over 35 years of age, and nothing for those under that age. Young members aged 18 to 23 pay only 121 pounds per year, rising to 443 pounds between 33 and 35. The annual fee for London residents over 35 is 1151 pounds, with a reduced rate of 920 for Londoners over 75 years of age. Overseas members pay a modest 393 pounds, or 315 if over 75.

## **FACILITIES AND DRESS CODE**

The Club has an attractive, five-story, off-white double townhouse facing north on Brook Street, with a new mews wing behind, and a substantial, unique undercroft. There is a library, dining room, large ball room, bar, gaming room, various meeting rooms, and a Savile billiards room. Since the two town houses had to be merged and the mews room

installed behind, some of the corridors are confusing and feel a bit jumbled. The Club has reduced activities on the weekend.

The club, with its period ballroom, imposing staircase and other lovely interiors, has attracted a number of films and TV shows, most notably the hit PBS series “Downton Abbey.” For this show the club was used as the “Embassy Club,” where two not-quite-star-crossed lovers met for the first time.



The dress code for all meals including breakfast is a vague standard that dress should “not offend other members.” Jackets and a collared shirt but no tie is how this is usually interpreted. No jeans and trainers (gym shoes) are allowed. Members and reciprocals need not observe the dress code when going in or out of the club directly to/from their rooms. Use of electronic devices is banned in the most areas. Reading is banned in the bar, apparently to encourage conversation.

The Savile Club has about 70 reciprocal clubs around the world, including the hard-to-secure Travellers Club in Paris. Club activities include weekly jazz concerts put on by members, professional concerts, scientific lectures, film screenings, bridge, golf, “real tennis,” snooker and Savile billiards. This latter is a special form of billiards with unique rules devised to make the game more exciting.

## FOOD

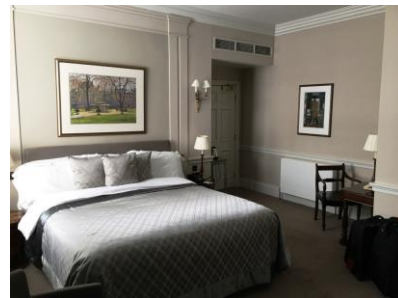
We had lunch on a weekday and two breakfasts at the club. The lunch entrees included a disappointing mackerel fish with a metallic taste, and a plaice which was bland and uninteresting.



The breakfast was fine and a good value, at seven pounds for a full breakfast and four for a continental. A pint of beer is only 2.50 pounds in the club, versus about six pounds in nearby pubs. Food and front desk service was friendly.

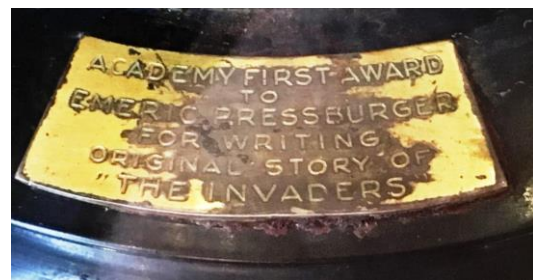
## BEDROOMS

There are 25 bedrooms at the Club. Only the five in the new news wing are air-conditioned. Our en-suite



extra-king bedroom (Mews 5) was about 15 x 14 feet, large for London. It had an attractive taupe and gray décor, effective AC, modern TV, good included WiFi, small writing desk, closet and handy electrical sockets. As a reciprocal we paid 210 pounds per night. This bedroom provided a good combination of size, effective AC and a reasonable (for London!) rate. Since we visited in August, we likely would not have been happy with a non-air-conditioned room, the largest of which were priced at the same rate as ours.

Other photos of the club are shown below.





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