

Westburn Street, 1956 to 1975

Contributed by Administrator
Monday, 23 July 2007

The first committee meeting in the new premises took place on Sunday 22 July 1956 at 8.00 p.m. The club did not get a drinks licence right away and it was not until its meeting of 30 September 1956 that the committee was advised that the club was successful in getting a licence. The bar in the clubs premises in Westburn Street was opened on Friday 7 October 1956 at 7 p.m. The club was first registered with the Sheriff Court as a club on 1 October 1956. Incidentally the first new members to get 'made up' in these new premises were Daniel Morrison and Bennie McDade.

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The club had held an annual dance since 1948 and at its meeting of 20 October 1957 the committee decided , on the Chairman's casting vote to hold the forthcoming annual dance in the Moorings as the Town hall was unavailable on the dates requested.

The Moorings was quite a plush ballroom in Largs. The club was able to get agreement with the management of the Moorings that the club could supply its own drink, both alcoholic and non alcoholic for the members and partners attending the annual dance. Eventually the management of the Moorings wanted this arrangement of the Moorings wanted this arrangement to stop and the club would not agree to this and the last annual dace in the Moorings was held during March 1965.

The dances at the Moorings were quite grand affairs with transport provided from Greenock to Largs and a printed programme for the evening provided. It should be borne in mind that dining out was very much the exception for most members at that time and the surroundings of the Moorings combined with a meal, speeches and a dance were much enjoyed by all who attended.

The evening would be finished off with a supper for everyone to help them on the journey home. At the tenth annual dinner dance held on Monday 17 March 1958, the first to be held in the Moorings, the programme was as follows:

Grace

- Toast our Club - John Cannon

Dinner

Words of

Hugh D. Trainer

Welcome Toast Town & Trade Reply

John Grant

Provost David

Gerrard, M.A., J.P.

Guest Speakers

Vote of Thanks

William Lamont Sen.

The Committee members were also listed in this programme as:

Office Bearers

- President - Hugh D. Trainer
- Vice-President - William Cannon
- Treasurer - John Grant
- Ticket Convenor - Thomas Connelly
- Transport Convenor - Thomas Cannon
- Social Convenor - George Alford

Committee

- William Ferrie
- William MacClennachan
- John Porter
- William Docherty ©
- William Docherty (P)
- James Fulton

A contemporary account of the dance held on 16 March 1962 is described in the Celtic F.C. Supporters Association handbook of 1962 - 63 as follows:

" Our Greenock Branch made merry on March 16th last in the Moorings Ballroom, Largs. The occasion was their Annual Dance. Guests of the evening were the Provost, Chief Constable and Town Clerk of Greenock accompanied by their wives; and your E.C. were represented by B.Kernan, H Delaney, George Marshall and P. Mc Gibbon, again with their wives. The guests were welcomed by the Greenock Branch Committee ably led by their Vice-President, John Porter. After a lovely dinner, during which some very witty speeches were made, the huge company adjourned to the beautiful ballroom to Twist the night away. During an interval from dancing Provost Reid presented prizes to the winners of the Branch snooker, dominoes and darts competitions. At the very close of the evening and after company headed home after a really wonderful evening. Greenock President Hugh Trainner, who could not be present because of illness, is now keeping very much better and we wish him well and a speedy return to complete good health"

Even after the final dance was held in the Moorings the club continued to organise an Annual Dance which was very much a highlight of the club's year. The dances were held in either Greenock or Port Glasgow Town Halls and were still on the grand scale with most members and their partners attending. The format of the evening outlined for the Moorings continued in these other venues. Guests from Celtic Football Club were also invited to these functions and over the years have included Jock Stein, Desmond White, Jack McGinn, Kevin Kelly, Jimmy McGrory, Jimmy Delaney, Stevie Chalmers, Billy McNeill, Benny Rooney, Bobby Lennox, Bobby Murdoch, Jim Craig. Sadly apathy from members meant that the popularity of this major club activity declined and eventually an AGM of the club decided to cancel the annual dances.

The problem of members using or not using the club is not a recent one, as far back as December 1959 the President, Hugh Trainner stated:-

"there were members in the club who only use the club for uplifting Scotia tickets and going away again, he said they did not know one another well enough."

At its meeting of 31 March 1958 the committee agreed that the club run an open domino competition for teams in the Greenock District Domino League, the competition for the Celtic Cup was won by a team from the Celtic F.C. Supporters' Club, Greenock. This was a very popular tournament with teams participating from clubs and workplaces. The tournament was held every year in the Westburn Street premises and was helpful to the club as it brought a crowd into the club during the early part of the week. The tournament came to an end after the move to the premises at Laird Street as it was held in the hall in the first floor where the wearing of jeans was not allowed and many participants objected to this.

During the early 1960's the club was very concerned about the stance of newspapers with regard to the Celtic F.C. At the committee meeting of 16 November 1961 the anti Celtic stance of the Daily Express and Sunday Express was discussed and it was suggested that the travel club tickets, Scotia tickets, be changed to another newspaper. Nothing obviously came of this suggestion as the use of Scotia tickets continued until the current system of a weekly draw was instituted for the Travel club. During the early 1960's the Celtic team were also causing the committee much concern at that time. At its August meeting of 1962 issues such as a possible boycott or sending a resolution to Mr Kelly, chairman of Celtic F.C. were discussed by the committee. Nothing seems to have been done about this as it was not mentioned in the minutes thereafter.

Women were not allowed to enter the club premises and it caused some consternation when the Celtic F.C. Supporters' Association requested that the Westburn Street clubrooms be used to hold a delegates meeting on 13 December 1963.

There were some female delegates from member clubs and it was agreed that female delegates to the Association be allowed to enter the club for the purposes of this meeting.

The club was always looking to improve the facilities and services provided to its members. Refurbishment of premises was undertaken periodically. At the committee meeting of 3 October 1962 it was agreed that the club get 'heavy beer' for a trial period in response to requests from members. At its meeting of 30 September 1963 the possibility of purchasing larger premises was raised but it was agreed that moves be made to purchase the flat adjacent to the club. The flat was eventually purchased at a cost of £600 plus one case of Whiskey! This allowed the club to form a fire escape and a lounge. This also enable the club to build a ladies toilet and allow women to enter the club for the first time.

During the period the club started its long term relationship with Chequers, the three piece dance band which has become the favourite of many of the members and been the subject of discussion and debate at a number of general meetings.

The band at the time consisted of Duncan Bryceland, George Orr and Jimmy McVey, Roy Whiteford has replaced Jimmy McVey since it first became the club's regular band.

The running of buses to take members and friends to support Celtic has always been the prime rationale for the club's existence. The golden years of Celtic took place during the Club's time in Westburn Street and each Saturday five or six coach loads of supporters would leave the club. For European Cup games this number would increase and for European Cup semi finals as many as thirteen fully laden coaches would leave the club, with adults sitting and young boys seated on their father's knees.

The members in addition to purchasing Scotia tickets also had to pay for each bus journey to a game. At the committee meeting of 3rd October 1963 the bus charges for the forthcoming game with Valencia in the European Cup Winners Cup at Celtic Park were discussed. It was agreed that the cost be 2/6 (12 1/2p) per member and all such games should be at that cost. By 19 April 1964 the travel club was in such a strong position that it was agreed that members travel free to all games in the Glasgow area.

The highlight for all Celtic fans was winning the European Cup on 25 May, 1967. Thousands attended the game including a sizeable contingent from the Celtic F.C.Supporters' Club, Greenock. The members of the club who attended the match were featured in the front page of the Greenock Telegraph of 25 May 1967 under the headline ' Greenock's Celtic Fans Fly Out' with a photograph showing some of those attending the game standing on stairs in the airport.

The narrative accompanying the photograph stated:

It was an early start today for more than a hundred Celtic fans from Greenock. They set off- two planes-loads of them- on the journey to Lisbon around 6 this morning. Here are some of them showing the flag in no uncertain fashion. On the left of the banner is Mr John Dougan, who was responsible for the arranging of the entire Cup Final visit by local fans.'

The club received 115 tickets for The European Cup Final versus Internazionale Milan, each ticket cost 30/- (£1.50). The air fare for this game was £30/- deposit and it was decided that members need only pay back £20 by the 31 December 1967, there was one defaulter who did not pay this back and he therefore lost his membership.

The match was played on the 25 May, the feast of Corpus Christi, a Holyday of Obligation at that time. The day of the flight to Lisbon started with Mass at 4 a.m. in St Laurence's Church celebrated by Father Ryan. The match tickets were distributed after mass.

There were a couple of mishaps during that day, one of the party, Pat Adams lost the bag containing his passport and the Portuguese passport control allowed John Dougan to vouch for him in order that he could leave the country. Another member of the party, Danny Robinson failed to return to the plane. The place was held back for as long as possible.

When the party returned, John Dougan phoned to inform Danny Robinson's family that he missed the plane. The phone was answered by Danny Robinson advising that he managed to 'hitch' a lift on the flight organised by the St. Brendan's Club in Linwood.

At its meeting of 20 November 1962 the committee appointed Thomas Jack as new Clubmaster from 11 applicants. Mr Jack had previously been employed as a barman in the club and remained as Clubmaster until 1975 when he retired. This was the start of a successful association between Thomas Jack and the club which lasted beyond his retrial date. Indeed his family were all trusted servants of the club who have served behind the bar since that time. This period was one of consolidation in which the foundations for further success were laid. His son, Robert Jack, the current Clubmaster was appointed from that date and continued this successful relationship with the club. His appointment coincided with the move to our Laird Street premises, the time for the club's most significant financial progress.

During 1971 The club's lawyer advised that the 100 ' B' member should have full membership and voting rights. It was also decided at that time the waiting list of 46 be eliminated. The club decided to charge 25 pence plus a £5 entry fee to join the club. Given this growth in membership it was felt that the premises in Westburn Street were too small for the enlarged membership and during 1971 it was decided to look for new premises.