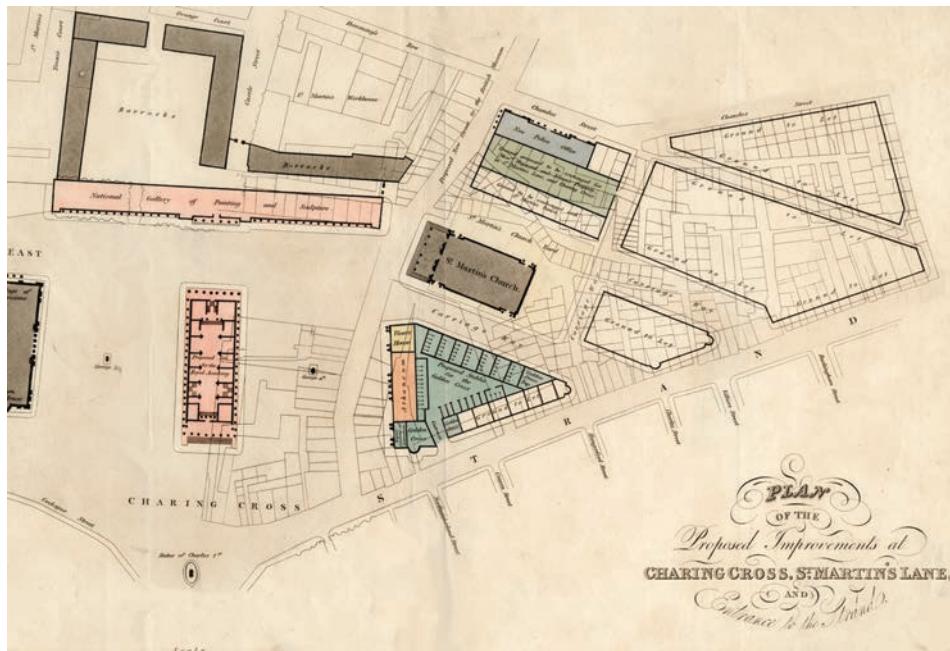


6. This may be Decimus Burton's design elevation for the Athenæum's clubhouse at its first proposed site, the newly developed Pall Mall East, in 1824. Presented in a domestic idiom, it is simple, appropriate to its scale, self-assured and elegant.



7. The second site proposed for the Athenæum is shown on the eastern side of Union Square (later Trafalgar Square), where South Africa House now stands. The building is shown with a portico of five pillars, between the Royal Academy of Literature and the 'Vicar's House' for St Martin-in-the-Fields.



8. This is probably Burton's scheme for the proposed Union Square site. Written at the bottom of the sheet are the words 'N.B. The panels are proposed to receive the Elgin Frieze'. A Panathenaic frieze, based on the Elgin Marbles, is the most famous external feature of the built clubhouse in Pall Mall.



9. The built clubhouse was painted for Decimus Burton by an unknown artist, from across Waterloo Place. Like the balcony, the entrance portico and the large spearless statue by Edward Hodges Baily (based on the Pallas Athena of Velletri in the Louvre), the Panathenaic frieze was a beautiful addition to a building that would have been very plain without it. Next door is the Travellers Club.

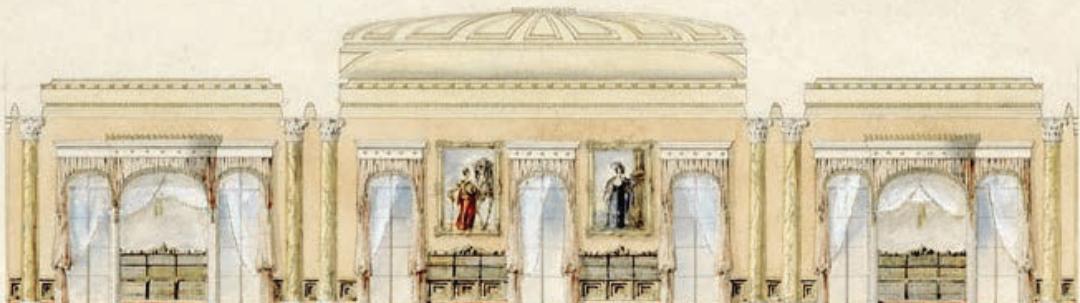




10. In 1841 the spectator was 'immediately struck by the classic taste, the refined feeling of the design' of the hall. The introduction of statues and the absence of pictures intensified the aura of academic classicism in the Grecian style.



WEST SIDE OF LIBRARY.



EAST SIDE OF LIBRARY.

11. The drawing room is identified as the 'Library' in Burton's original designs. Had all his proposed classical motifs been adopted, the room would have continued the antiquarian theme of the hall and landing even more clearly.



12. In 1833 Burton was asked to design these larger classical bookcases, reflecting the fact that the club's collection of books and pamphlets was growing rapidly. The bookcases were topped with plaster busts of famous literary, scientific and artistic figures – a fitting pantheon for a British 'Athenaeum'. The open door on the right reveals what is now known as the north library.

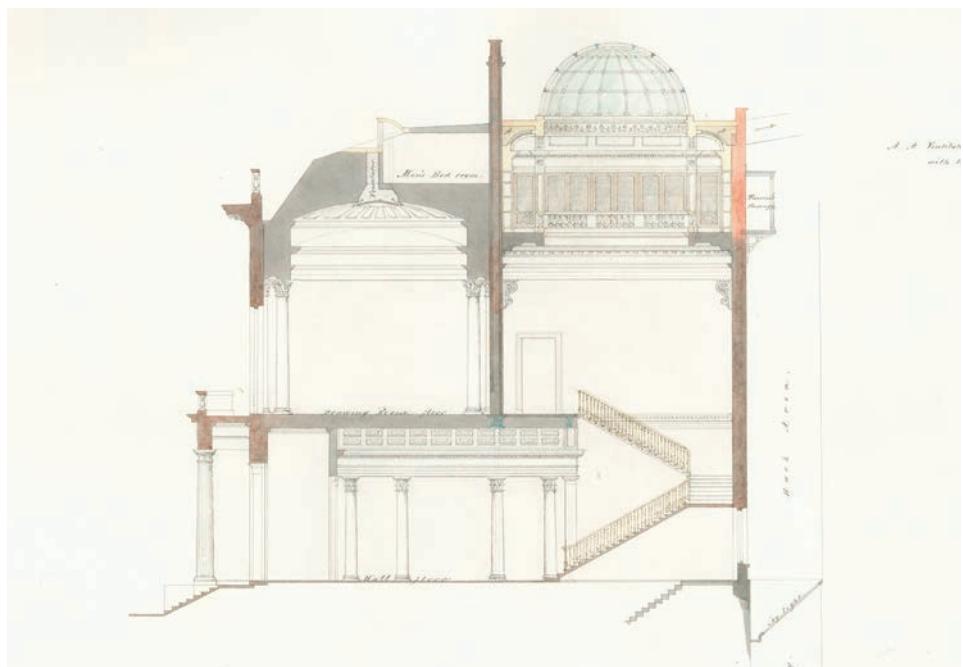




13. We are looking north in 1842. To the west of Waterloo Place are the clubhouses of the Athenæum (Decimus Burton, 1830), the Travellers Club (Charles Barry, 1832) and the Reform Club (Charles Barry, 1841). John Nash's United Service Club (1828) is on the eastern side of Waterloo Place.



14. Eleven of Lord Aberdeen's cabinet in 1854 were members of the Athenæum: Aberdeen, Charles Wood, Sir William Molesworth, the duke of Argyll, Lord Clarendon, Lord Lansdowne, Lord John Russell, Lord Granville, Lord Palmerston, Sir George Grey and the duke of Newcastle.



15. In 1853–54 Burton produced numerous alternative plans and elevations in response to the General Committee's request for 'greater accommodation' for the library and morning room. Most of these involved 'an Upper Story or Attic being placed in the external walls, so as to provide additional accommodation for the Library and Servants' Sleeping Rooms'.



16. In order to expand capacity at minimum cost, this impressive three-tiered arrangement of galleried bookcases was completed in 1856. Visitors are enchanted by the view from the drawing room through the glazed doors, whereas members who suffer from vertigo rely upon the intrepid library staff to fetch books from the galleries for them.

17. Two members, Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema and Sir Edward Poynter, designed schemes for the redecoration of the clubhouse in the 1890s. Among the elements of their designs that have survived is this exotic lantern above the staircase, more Venetian Renaissance in style than anything approaching Burton's Greek revival.



18. The morning room. In 1898 Sir Edward Poynter's 'gorgeous' ceiling was coloured a 'deep but vivid blue' rather than green and was lavishly gilded; the room's walls were of 'gold Japanese leather, and its woodwork of broken brown'. It was all 'wonderfully sumptuous and daring'. Poynter's redecorated morning room is a late Victorian survival in the clubhouse.

## ATHENÆVM CLVB



Elevation of West Side

19. In Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema's elevation of the drawing room (1893), the dominant red colouring (Plate 12) has been replaced by green, and aluminium leaf applied to the ornamentation of the central dome and the cornice and ceiling beams. The room that had enchanted Charles Darwin and Matthew Arnold when they first joined was now beautifully embellished.



Sketch of Drawing - room. (Tadana)

— ATHENÆUM - CLUB —  
— PROPOSED ALTERATIONS 1888 —



20. This is the frontispiece to the 'proposed alterations & additions to the Club House' which Charles Barry (son of Sir Charles) was asked to present as the club's honorary architect. Rejected on cost grounds, his scheme is a reminder of what might have been. Barry resigned, along with his brother.



THE ATHENÆUM PREVIOUS TO 1899.



THE ATHENÆUM AT THE PRESENT TIME, 1925.

21. When Collcutt's scheme was approved in 1899, *The Builder* announced that 'We shall have the spectacle of a large building, designed with classic regularity and dignity, carrying on its roof a structure of inferior character and which has no obvious means of support, being erected within the main walls'. The article's aesthetic judgments were unanswerable.

its offices - the latter  
will amaze you - & you  
will know more of the  
inner life of bishops  
than in a hundred  
biographies of them.



22. In his letter addressed to 'Ruddy, my dear', Sir Edward Burne-Jones promised that the newly elected Rudyard Kipling would soon 'know more of the inner life of bishops than in a hundred biographies of them'. Bishops' distinctive dress led to their number being exaggerated.



23. This image from a complimentary postcard marking the club's centenary shows that the furniture in the drawing room, which Decimus Burton labelled as the 'Library' in 1829, was still arranged as in the private library of a great house, for 'literary purposes', in the 1920s. The dome disappeared in 1927–28 when the clubhouse was remodelled.

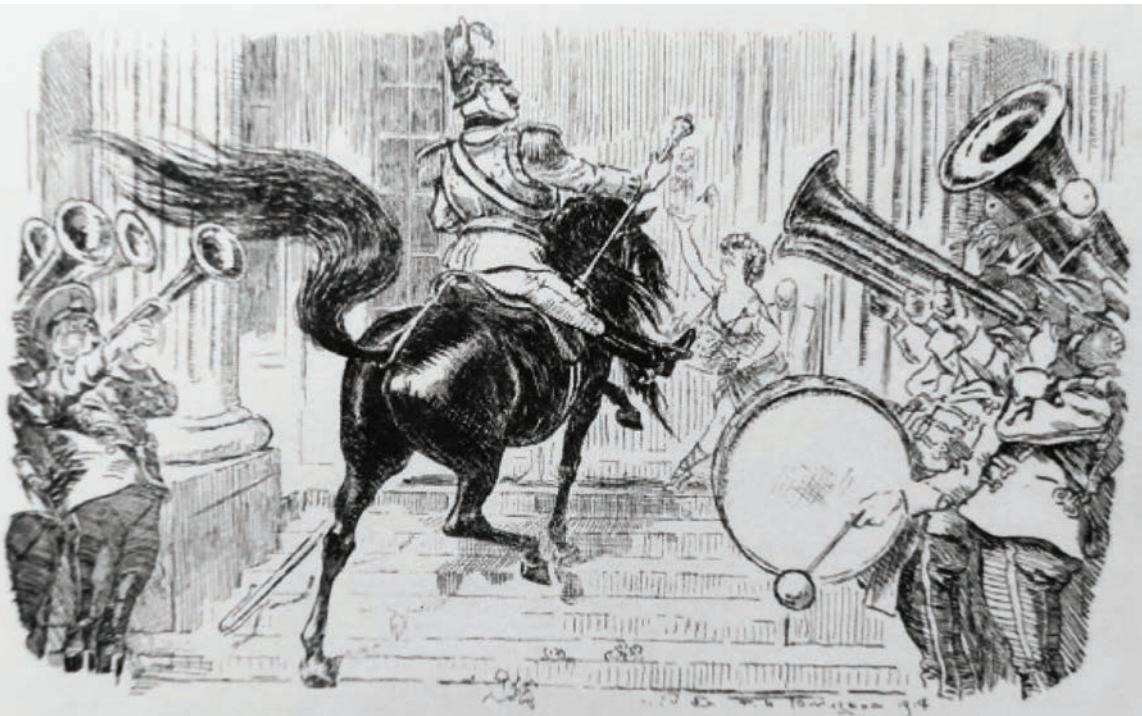


24. George Morrow's ink drawing was for a *Punch* cartoon entitled 'Raid on the Athenæum Club' (1906) in the series called *Our Untrustworthy Artist in London*. So quiet was the Athenæum that *Punch* reported on the club's addiction to dancing, singing, boxing and late-night debauchery in the only full-page article on Clubland in the magazine's history to that date.



25. James Dewar, seen here lecturing on liquid hydrogen, was elected to the Athenæum under Rule II in 1884 and was knighted in 1904. The club had close ties with the Royal Institution: half the male figures in Brooks's idealised group portrait were present or future Athenians.





26. The propaganda war over 'culture' arrived at the Athenæum's door in a *Punch* cartoon of 1915 depicting the Kaiser mounting the club's steps. The artist Frederick Henry Townsend was not a member, but nuanced references to the club in the accompanying anonymous verses, 'When William Comes to Town', suggest that Sir Owen Seaman, editor of *Punch* and a member of the Executive Committee, was the author.



27. George Morrow's 'Bringing in the Boiled Owl' was the festive contribution to a series of *Entertainments at Which We Have Never Assisted* in *Punch*. It was first used as the club's Christmas card in 1956.

28. Among the many writers and artists who were proposed by Sir William Rothenstein, the most popular proved to be his close friend Max Beerbohm, whose cartoons of 'Club Types' (1892) had included a bespectacled intellectual from the Athenæum.





THE NEW MEMBER OF THE ATHENAEUM CLUB WHO ASKED THE WAY  
TO THE COCKTAIL BAR

29. H.M. Bateman achieved international fame through *The Man Who* series of cartoons which focused upon social gaffes, such as 'The Man Who Lit His Cigar before the Royal Toast'. The 'New Member' cartoon (1930) reflects the popular image of the Athenaeum as a retreat for the elderly, who were served drinks on silver salvers.



30. In 1936 no. 6 Carlton Gardens, formerly owned by Gladstone, became the ladies' annexe to the nearby Athenæum. The house provided five reception rooms, four bedrooms for members and ten maid-servants' bedrooms for twenty maids. Faded photographs and negatives in the club's archives reveal soft furnishings and modern furniture.



31. Although ‘mercifully spared damage by Flying Bombs, beyond the breaking of windows’, the clubhouse was pockmarked by the end of the Second World War. Athena, camouflaged in bronze green, grasps her spear and looks down at an aboveground splinter shelter that was built by Westminster City Council in the spring of 1940 to accommodate 1,050 people.



32. ‘Pon my Word, Barnstaple’ (1962). The Athenaeum gratefully accepted the originals of several *Express* cartoons by Sir Osbert Lancaster featuring senior clerics. Today they are displayed in the lobby next to the lift and adjacent to the gents.

33. In 1967 Sir John Betjeman resigned from the Athenæum in protest against 'the ugly new lighting in the entrance hall and the trivial wallpapering of the Great Room on the first floor'. Having been readmitted twice he finally left in the early 1980s. He would not have liked another 'Trust House' style of intervention when the hall floor was covered with PVC 'chessboard' tiling in 1969.



34. In 1979 the General Committee felt the need to promote 'friendly relations among Members', encouraging those who used the 'communal tables' in the coffee room to 'sit next or opposite to places already occupied'. John Nevinson, a retired civil servant, donated a dedicated long table for the purpose in 1986, since when 'Club Table' has become one of the most cherished aspects of life at the Athenæum.





35. In 1974 the chairman of the General Committee met 'a group of Members opposed to Lady Guests being allowed the use of the Drawing Room after dinner'. This group, known as 'The Misogynists', later wisely changed their name to 'The Traditionalists'. Meanwhile Osbert Lancaster's Maudie Littlehampton says, 'Tell me Bishop, is it true that even the Athenæum's thinking of going bi-sexual?'



36. Most of the original smoking room was hidden from view in 1958 when plaster walls and false ceilings were introduced to create extra bedrooms for staff, later converted to members' bedrooms. These additions were removed in 2009, revealing elegant plasterwork in a second drawing room that could be used for meetings and private events in an increasingly busy clubhouse.

When the next major European war broke out, Hardy felt that ‘as the leading older poet he ought to set an example’, and his popular poem ‘Song of the Soldiers’ appeared in *The Times* on 5 September 1914.<sup>117</sup> Angry anti-German poems followed, including ‘England to Germany in 1914’, ‘On the Belgian Expatriation’, and ‘An Appeal to America on behalf of the Belgian Destitute’.<sup>118</sup> Deeply affected by the death of a cousin at Gallipoli in August 1915, he wrote an elegy entitled ‘Before Marching and After’ which explores the workings of memory and association when bad news from the battlefield enters the domestic space:

When the heath wore the robe of late summer,  
And the fuchsia-bells, hot in the sun,  
Hung red by the door, a quick comer  
Brought tidings that marching was done . . .<sup>119</sup>

Arthur Benson, who used the Athenæum as his London base, recalled an occasion there around 1912 when he ‘felt like Alice between the two Queens’, acting as an interpreter between Hardy and Henry James, neither of whom could hear a word that the other was saying.<sup>120</sup> As a fellow and later Master of Magdalene College Cambridge, that most gentlemanly of institutions, Benson supported the principle of electing leading literary figures to honorary fellowships, the first of whom was Thomas Hardy in 1913. Yet Benson recorded in his diary that Hardy had the face ‘not of a farmer or peasant, like old Carlyle, but of a village tradesman’. The American Henry James, on the other hand, looked and acted like an English gentleman, and responded to the war by being naturalised as a British subject in July 1915 because of his ‘attachment to the country and his sympathy with it and its people’. Among his sponsors in that process were two members of the club: Asquith and Rowland Prothero’s brother, George, editor of the *Quarterly Review*.<sup>121</sup> James volunteered to help Belgian refugees, visited wounded soldiers in hospital and became president of the American Volunteer Motor Ambulance Corps. *Within the Rim and other Essays 1914–15* (1919) was a posthumous collection of pieces that he had contributed to the war effort, including an essay entitled ‘The long wards’ which ends, ‘I believe in Culture – speaking strictly now of the honest and of our own congruous kind.’<sup>122</sup>

When Kipling read the announcement of James's naturalisation in *The Times*, he wrote to him, 'You don't know what it means or what it will go on to mean not to the Empire alone but to all the world of civilization that you've thrown in your lot with them.'<sup>123</sup> Kipling, the empire's unofficial laureate before and during the war, lunched regularly in what he called the 'solemn halls of the Athenæum', where he met many of the political leaders.<sup>124</sup> While not agreeing to write sponsored propaganda, he devoted his time to projects related to the war, including writing the history of the Irish Guards, his son's regiment, and joining the Imperial War Graves Commission, for which he provided most of the words, including those inscribed on the Stone of Sacrifice in the cemeteries – 'Their name liveth for evermore' – and becoming a Rhodes trustee.<sup>125</sup> Like Henry James, he published collections of essays and reviews in aid of the war effort, with titles such as *The New Army in Training*, *France at War on the Frontier of Civilization* and *Fringes of the Fleet*, all published in 1915. His most effective study of hatred of the Germans, in which he came to share, was 'Mary Postgate', published in *A Diversity of Creatures* in 1917, a story of revenge with powerful psychological and sexual undercurrents.

Kipling had helped his friend Sir Rider Haggard with some of his plots. Famous for his exotic African romances of exploration and derring-do, Haggard had been elected under Rule II in 1895. He was knighted in 1912 and appointed KBE in 1919 for public service, and was a member of the Empire Settlement Committee for the relocation of war veterans to parts of the Empire. Escapist romances were popular during the war, and Haggard's *Finished* (1917), which featured an image of a Zulu on the dust-jacket, took the reviewer in *Punch* back to his schooldays. The title was worrying, however – was this the end of Allan Quatermain? – and 'whether the old careless rapture is altogether recovered is another matter'.<sup>126</sup> Millions viewed the propaganda film *The Battle of the Somme*, released in August 1916, and were shocked by sequences which are now known to have been reconstructions. Haggard was moved to write, 'There is something appalling about the instantaneous change from fierce activity to supine death. . . . War has always been dreadful, but never, I suppose, more dreadful than today.'<sup>127</sup>

Visual representations of life and death at the Front were available through the *Illustrated London News*, which carried maps, photographs and dramatic

graphic reconstructions of hand-to-hand fighting, together with a page or two of small studio photographs of fallen officers, week after week. Among the war artists recruited by Wellington House to work in France were three future members of the club: William Orpen (elected in 1920), William Rothenstein (1925) and Francis Dodd (1935). Older artists, such as the three members who produced the commemorative paintings discussed at the beginning of this chapter, worked mainly or exclusively in their studios in Britain. Solomon Solomon was an exception. Elected under Rule II in 1907, he had been taught in the Royal Academy Schools by Leighton, Millais and Alma-Tadema, all former members, in the late 1870s. Having explained the significance of camouflage to the War Office at the outbreak, Lieutenant-Colonel Solomon of the Royal Engineers was sent to help the French in 1916 and to establish a camouflage section in Flanders. He opened a camouflage school in Kensington Gardens, focusing upon the concealment from the air of large areas of terrain, and published a book on camouflage in 1920.<sup>128</sup> A *Punch* cartoon of June 1917 entitled ‘The Arts in War-time’ was the first of several to make fun of a subject which for Solomon became something of an obsession: at one point he believed that the Germans had huge armies under netting.<sup>129</sup>

Strongly held views among members on matters relating to the war became problematic when the club’s name was invoked in their dissemination. No subject was more controversial in the years leading up to the war than naval expansion, and the Library Committee took care to build up a significant holding in naval history.<sup>130</sup> Admirals Fisher and Beresford were both members. Fisher, who was to be reinstated as First Sea Lord in October 1914 at the age of seventy-three, pursued policies that were supported by the British Navy League, whereas between 1908 and 1913 Beresford’s support came from the Imperial Maritime League (or ‘Navier League’), of which Lionel Horton Smith, a fellow member, was co-founder and secretary. In 1913 the Executive Committee warned Horton Smith against using the club’s address in published statements, but then changed its mind. On that basis Horton Smith repeated the practice in 1915, in three letters to the press that were later reprinted in pamphlet form – *The Issue; or, Why We Are at War* (August 1914), *Never to Rise Again: ‘Deutschland unter alles’* (June 1915) and *The Perils of Ignorance* (July 1915) – all endorsed with the club’s address. Although the Executive

## THE ATHENÆUM

Committee were clearly anxious to suppress the practice in wartime, they were tired of corresponding with him and declined to discuss the matter further in October 1916.<sup>131</sup>

As a literary club with an unwritten rule of confidentiality and a membership which included cabinet ministers and senior civil servants, the Athenæum was better suited to those writers who worked secretly for Wellington House. In September 1914 Masterman established a subdivision of his organisation with the express purpose of distributing propaganda in America. Gilbert Parker was highly successful in the role, for which he was unpaid, accumulating over 13,000 American contacts, including academics, scientists, doctors and politicians, and distributing the works of authors such as Kipling and John Galsworthy, a future member of the Athenæum.<sup>132</sup> Having published novels and a study of the war entitled *The World in a Crucible* (1915), Parker was given a baronetcy for his service in 1915, became a Privy Counsellor in 1916 and was elected to the club in 1917.

Wellington House also produced its own newspapers, including one based on the *Illustrated London News* and printed on its rollers, and recruited lecturers, the most popular of whom was Gilbert Murray.<sup>133</sup> Murray, elected to the club in 1917, had won all the prizes when he was up at Oxford with his friend Laurens Fisher, himself an excellent classicist. After Fisher was made Secretary of the Board of Education by Lloyd George in December 1916, Murray worked part time in the department and used his position to help those imprisoned as conscientious objectors, most notably Bertrand Russell.<sup>134</sup>

Fisher, who had been elected to the club in 1908, was the vice-chancellor of Sheffield University. He served on the Bryce committee that investigated alleged German outrages in 1914–15 and that received over 1,200 depositions made by witnesses.<sup>135</sup> Only one of the committee was not a present or future member of the Athenæum. When the academic lawyer Frederick Pollock was elected in 1879 he had become the third generation of Pollocks in the club; Sir Kenelm Digby, a member since 1889, was a retired lawyer and civil servant who was appointed as an additional member of the committee in January 1915; Harold Cox MP, an economist and journalist, would be elected in 1919; and Alfred Hopkinson, who had retired as vice-chancellor of Victoria University of Manchester, in 1931. Their report, published in May 1915, was

later found to be unreliable, as it was based on evidence that had not been corroborated.

Like George Darroch, Captain Bertrand Stewart worked in intelligence. Appointed to General Allenby's staff, he left for France with the Cavalry Division and on 12 September 1914 became the first member of the club to be killed in action, aged forty-two. The fact that his death was not announced until the Annual Report was circulated in May 1916 perhaps reflects the sensitive nature of his work. Buchan's intelligence work provided material for his novels, which 'stirred the pulses' with their improbable accounts of German spies and heroic British counter-espionage. *The Thirty-nine Steps*, published in *Blackwood's Magazine* (August–September 1915) ends with Hannay commenting, 'I had done my best work, I think, before I put on khaki.' The previous year Buchan had suggested to his partners at Nelson's that they should publish a history of the war. After Conan Doyle and Hilaire Belloc had declined the commission, Buchan took on the task himself, eventually producing a work of over a million words in twenty-four volumes and donating the royalties to war charities.<sup>136</sup> Masterman quietly subsidised some of Nelson's output, thus keeping the business afloat. When the War Office finally agreed that journalists could visit the Front, as the war was clearly going to be protracted and the civilian population needed to be supplied with better news coverage, one of the first five to go there was Buchan. His reliance on General Headquarters for casualty figures meant that British losses were played down and the Germans' exaggerated, although by 1916 Buchan had access to much better information.<sup>137</sup> Late in 1917 Lloyd George made Buchan Director of Intelligence in a Ministry of Information under Lord Beaverbrook.<sup>138</sup>

At the beginning of the war, Lutyens went to the club 'to get the news', and the thirst for first-hand information became even greater towards the end. Buchan was in a powerful position in this regard. Newbolt later told Buchan's wife, Lady Tweedsmuir, of his 'steadiness through every crisis' and of his impact in the coffee room:

During the dark days of the German break-through in 1918, when Haig's despatch containing the words 'Our backs are against the wall' had sent a shudder through the nation, Henry described to me the lunch hour at the

## THE ATHENÆUM

Athenæum Club, where busy men were rapidly eating a war-time meal. When John came in all heads turned in his direction and whispers were rife. ‘How does he look to-day? Does he look more cheerful than yesterday?’ Henry always said that John’s imperturbable calm did not vary, and that this did a great deal to steady people.<sup>139</sup>

In the years 1914–18 the club provided those members whose contributions to the war effort kept them in London with a haven where information could be exchanged in confidence. Afterwards, a few leading members also helped to shape the nation’s memorialisation of its dead. Kipling provided the words that were inscribed on war graves designed by Lutyens, who also designed the Cenotaph in London. Words from Binyon’s ‘For the Fallen’ were read at war memorials throughout the country at Remembrance Sunday services. Curzon, who introduced the two-minute silence and the sounding of the last post at the Cenotaph, also organised the project that culminated in the burial of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster Abbey on 11 November 1920. Kipling’s Recessional (‘God of our Fathers’) was sung at the service, and the Dean, Herbert Ryle, wrote the inscription for the tombstone, which ends with words from the second book of Chronicles: ‘They buried him among the kings because he had done good toward God and toward his house.’

## A ROOMFUL OF OWLS

In December 1918 General Julian Byng was welcomed home at Charing Cross station by an official party which included members of the cabinet.<sup>1</sup> He was then driven down Pall Mall in an open carriage with General Plumer, on their way to lunch at Buckingham Palace. As they passed the Athenæum, where Byng had recently been elected under Rule II, the generals waved enthusiastically. When various members waved back – surely an unprecedented moment of spontaneity – they were unaware that the conquering heroes were in fact responding to the club's chambermaids dancing on the upper balcony. The generals were convulsed in laughter and further waving ensued. Byng clearly enlivened the club later, too. In the lavatory there one day he asked Archbishop Davidson whether he had noticed that three pairs of nail scissors had disappeared since the election of the last three bishops; and in January 1921 Sir Henry Newbolt, Sir Owen Seaman, the architect Sir Reginald Blomfield and the classicist Dr W.H.D. Rowse chose Viscount Byng of Vimy to be their chairman when they planned a dinner for André Maurois, author of *The Silence of Colonel Bramble*.<sup>2</sup> One day in October 1926 Newbolt described how he was lunching at the Athenæum when Byng came in and was ‘quite embarrassingly affectionate before the whole roomful of Owls’.<sup>3</sup>

George Morrow's cartoon, ‘Bringing in the Boiled Owl (Athene's Sacred Bird) at the Christmas Dinner at the Athenæum Club’, had appeared in *Punch* the previous year (Plate 27).<sup>4</sup> This was one of a series of cartoons entitled ‘Entertainments at which we have Never Assisted’, in which famous clubs and learned societies are gently teased and fictitious clubs invented. In the case of

the Athenæum, the fact that both the editor and chief cartoonist of the magazine were ‘Owls’ would have been relished around the famous *Punch* table and in the club’s smoking room.<sup>5</sup> The Owls of Pall Mall did not go in for exuberant celebrations or public expressions of affection, and their reputation for ‘reserve and dignity’ was sustained throughout the 1920s and 1930s – the subject of this chapter – when a particular breed of highly educated and deeply serious members played leading roles in club life. Political decisions on national reconstruction were often based upon reports from advisory groups of the kind that had been needed during the war, and again many members of the club served as expert advisors in a wide range of fields. The influential civil servants and economists, bankers and industrialists, scientists and engineers who exchanged ideas over lunch or checked their references in the library would have acknowledged the force of Sir William Beveridge’s comment in his autobiography: ‘Influence, as the word is used here, means changing the actions of others by persuasion, means appeal to reason or to emotions other than fear or greed; the instruments of influence are words, spoken or written; if the influence is to be for good, it must rest on knowledge.’<sup>6</sup>

Athenians had always valued the opportunity to meet fellow members with different interests and from a wide variety of professions, and the freer spirits among them now enjoyed engaging with a generation of writers and artists who specialised in satire and caricature. Although the traditions of the club were still fiercely defended in the inter-war years, this was a period of innovation, with the ending of the ballot and the introduction of bedrooms for members, monthly Talk Dinners and an annexe where ladies could be entertained. Change, or rather adaptation was under way, both inside and outside the Athenæum.

At first the club struggled to balance its books. In June 1919, soon after the appearance of the Annual Report, the *Daily Mail* singled out the Athenæum (the ‘premier institution’) among the leading clubs that had financial difficulties and planned to increase their subscriptions.<sup>7</sup> Following losses in 1917 and 1918, a ‘serious crisis in the financial affairs of the Club’ was announced in the report.<sup>8</sup> As a result annual subscriptions, which had been held at 8 guineas since 1885, increased to 10 guineas in 1920 and then, after further increases in prices, to 12 guineas the following year, a rise of 50 per cent in just over

## A ROOMFUL OF OWLS

12 months. During the tortuous process of consultation on the finances, via a specially appointed Joint Committee of Enquiry (half General Committee members, half others) and subsequent EGMs and AGMs, administrative changes were also made. Guided by the Joint Committee, an EGM held in November 1919 further resolved that an Executive Secretary, who would also act as Manager and be responsible to the Executive Committee, should be appointed, in order to relieve Mr. Tedder of a portion of the onerous duties which he has discharged since his promotion in 1889 (after 15 years' service as Librarian) to the combined office of Secretary and Librarian. Mr. Tedder will in future be styled General Secretary and Librarian. Captain C.T.A. Hankey was chosen to fill the post of Executive Secretary, and commenced his duties on February 1st, 1920.<sup>9</sup> The Joint Committee believed that Henry Tedder was 'the embodiment of Athenæum spirit and tradition; and his loss from this point of view would be irreparable'.<sup>10</sup> On his retirement in 1922, Tedder the quintessential librarian was replaced as secretary by Clement Hankey, an army officer who had 'acted for some years as Camp Commandant, and Permanent Mess Secretary to the Political Mission attached to the Palestine Expeditionary Force'.<sup>11</sup> Educated at Rugby and Balliol, he was the elder brother of the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Maurice Hankey, and of Donald Hankey, author of *A Student in Arms*, who was killed in action on the Somme in 1916.

In July 1922 the Executive Committee suggested that a suitable way of marking the centenary of the club in 1924 would be the election of fifty new members, thus boosting not only the membership but also the income of the club.<sup>12</sup> The resolution that was approved by an overwhelming majority at an EGM the following November was proposed by Hugh Chisholm, whose 12th edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* was published in 1922, and seconded by Sir Herbert Jackson. It specified that the General Committee should be empowered to elect not more than fifty members from a special 'Centenary List' of candidates, the names to be 'of mature age on the Candidates' Book, as being men of such fully established reputation in Science, Literature, the Arts, Finance and Economics, Law, Professional life, or Public service in Church or State, as to add distinction to the membership of the Athenæum by their immediate election'.<sup>13</sup> The Executive Committee set to work, furnished with a printed list of candidates and typed notes on how things were done in 1838,

when the ‘Forty Thieves’ were elected; and by April 1923 they could send a shortlist of sixty-five men to the General Committee, most of them nominated by either Chisholm or Jackson, from whom the final fifty were selected.<sup>14</sup>

Whereas many of the Forty Thieves had been young men of great promise,<sup>15</sup> the Centenary List were of mature age and established reputation. While they included distinguished individuals such as Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson, the finest Hamlet of his generation, their election, together with that of the middle-aged men included in the ‘advanced ballot’,<sup>16</sup> did nothing to lower the club’s age profile, already high and the subject of adverse comment from members and non-members alike. A.C. Benson, elected in 1901, noted in his diary that the Edwardian Athenæum was ‘a rather terrible place, so much infirmity, such limping & coughing’.<sup>17</sup> (Cab drivers called the club ‘The Cough and Spit’.<sup>18</sup>) Meade Falkner’s jocular description of everyone at the club being ‘old and bald and blind’ in 1918 was written to amuse a godchild;<sup>19</sup> but even after the Second World War an historian of White’s commented that no club in London could count so many ‘white-haired and bald men’ among its members as the Athenæum.<sup>20</sup>

After a fruitless search for furnished rooms to be at the disposal of members, the General Committee acknowledged in 1923 that there was a ‘growing demand among Members for bedroom accommodation’.<sup>21</sup> Here was an opportunity to improve the club’s facilities and further increase its income. Sir Aston Webb, architect and president of the Royal Academy, was asked to prepare a scheme for an additional storey to the clubhouse.<sup>22</sup> Although approved by a group of distinguished Athenian architects, the scheme was rejected by the membership in time-honoured fashion and the search for rooms continued, much to the amusement of the *Evening News*, which reported in 1925 that ‘even the old-fashioned Athenæum is feeling the pressure of this modern movement’.<sup>23</sup> Again the search failed and again some of the in-house architects – Sir Edwin Lutyens, Burke Downing, Detmar Blow and Professor Frederick Simpson – were asked to develop a scheme to provide members’ bedrooms in the clubhouse. This time the members were persuaded by their arguments, in May 1927,<sup>24</sup> and plans were made to close the clubhouse between 29 August and 6 February 1928, temporary facilities having been arranged at neighbouring clubs.

## A ROOMFUL OF OWLS

A circular to members described the remodelling of the clubhouse to something that members would recognise today. On the second floor there were '7 bedrooms, well lighted, fitted with lavatory [i.e. wash] basins (hot and cold water), warmed by central heating and furnished by Heal, with two bathrooms and two W.C.'s, at a charge of 8s. 6d. per night; on the third floor a suite of similar rooms 'at present occupied by part of the Staff, will be available in the future if required'.<sup>25</sup> 'A new lift with a larger car than before and fresh machinery, gives access from the ground floor to the Upper Smoking Room and to both suites of bedrooms.' Alterations had to be made to the ceiling of the drawing room, which now lost its dome, and the opportunity was taken to redecorate the room. (Strangely, no record of the new décor is to be found in the club's archives.)

The guest room on the ground floor, formerly the writing room, was equipped with a service bar and lift from the kitchen, enabling members to 'entertain guests at all meals'. A lavatory was available on the ground floor, but the main lavatory was now situated in the basement adjoining the corridor to the billiard room. The great hall and staircase were redecorated under the directions of a sub-committee chaired by Sir Frank Dicksee PRA. The perennial problem of the 'rapidly increasing needs of the Library' was addressed by installing bookcases in the billiard room corridor and storing heavy folios and books not in frequent demand in a space under the drawing room floor and above the ceiling of the hall, 'access to which can now be had by means of a ladder through a small door cut in the wall on the back stairs'.

It was the provision of bedrooms rather than the athleticism of the library staff that attracted attention outside. In August 1928 the *Graphic* printed an article entitled 'Bed and breakfast at the Athenæum! – The idiosyncrasies of intellect: true stories of the brainiest club in the world'.<sup>26</sup> Readers were assured that, in spite of innovations relating to bedrooms and guests, the club was still a 'tremendously intelligent place' which made longevity a speciality. This last point will have touched a nerve. More pressing in 1927/28 was the need to finance works which cost about £27,000 to complete.<sup>27</sup> Like architectural expertise, financial advice was readily available in-house. In December 1927 the Executive Committee received proposals from Mervyn O'Gorman and Alan (later Sir Alan) Barlow, then a senior civil servant at the Ministry of

Labour. In their report Barlow was understandably pessimistic about potential contributions from members, as they had ‘never shown themselves at all ready to provide funds for the needs of the Club’.<sup>28</sup> Three months later the financial sub-committee consulted Frederick Goodenough, the founding company secretary of Barclay & Co. and a member since 1925. The club then offered members redeemable notes without interest at £25, each note purchased leading to a deduction of a guinea from subscriptions, which were now set at 15 guineas per annum (almost double the rate in 1920). In May 1928 Hankey could report that he had received applications amounting to £16,700 and by 19 June £11,050 had been received in cash.<sup>29</sup> Combined with income from bedroom rentals and an increase in the number of meals served, partly as a result of providing bedrooms and a guest room,<sup>30</sup> these measures set the club’s finances on a secure footing, with a membership that remained steady at around 1,370 ordinary members.

The clearest index of the ‘Athenæum spirit and tradition’ that Henry Tedder was said to epitomise is the manner in which the club planned and executed the celebration of its centenary. In 1921, a year before the idea of electing fifty new members was mooted, an official history was proposed. Tedder was the obvious choice as the author of the book, which would be illustrated and would be published by the club at its own expense.<sup>31</sup> The first change of hand in the club minutes since 1889 occurred on 11 April 1922, following Tedder’s retirement, when he became an honorary member for life with no fees.<sup>32</sup> In March 1924 it was reported that the history was expected to be ready for publication before the end of the centenary year.<sup>33</sup> Anxious enquiries were made in May,<sup>34</sup> but Tedder’s labour of love was left unfinished at his death on 1 August 1924. Having first lamented the loss of Tedder and made provision for his widow, the club turned to the author and journalist Humphry Ward, a member since 1885 and now serving on the Library Committee, to undertake the work, which duly went forward once the legality of paying a fee to a member had been confirmed.<sup>35</sup>

At least two-thirds of the time needed to complete such a project is taken up with research, and Tedder had done the research. So Ward ‘recast, rearranged and rewrote’ Tedder’s ‘mass of material’, following his arrangement ‘pretty closely’,

## A ROOMFUL OF OWLS

and produced a narrative of 111 printed pages in twelve months.<sup>36</sup> (The remaining 242 pages are biographical sketches of the Rule II members elected since 1831, many of which duplicate information available from the *Dictionary of National Biography*.) The handsome *History of the Athenæum, 1824–1925* was published in the spring of 1926 at 1 guinea to members and 25/- to booksellers. The cost of printing, binding and distributing the history was £582 and receipts from sales up to December were £423.<sup>37</sup> A suggestion, made as late as September 1925, that more portraits of deceased members of distinction would ‘add much to the attractions of the book’,<sup>38</sup> had been accepted by the Library Committee, who were responsible for the production. The work involved in reproducing these portraits, which account for twenty-five of the thirty-three black-and-white illustrations in the history, and an appeal for donations of originals to mark the centenary combined to enrich the Athenæum Collection, more than half of which is portraiture.<sup>39</sup> Portraits were now exhibited around the clubhouse, although bookcases still had priority for wall space and the mainly bare walls of the hall and coffee room still honoured the classicist intentions of the founders and their architect.

In June 1923, having already set in train both the club history and the Centenary List of new members, the General Committee received a report from its Centenary sub-committee in which further suggestions were made. The most significant of these was a dinner in the coffee room along the lines of that for the Order of Merit (1902), to be held on or about 28 May 1924, ‘being the date of the occupation of the original Club House . . . and the adoption of the name of *The Athenæum* in place of *The Society* as that of the Club’.<sup>40</sup> Eight months later, on 16 February 1924, the raising of the flag (presumably the Union Flag) ‘to the top of the mast’ was drawn to members’ attention, this being ‘Foundation Day’ on which the inaugural committee had met in Somerset House in 1824.<sup>41</sup> Thirty-three places at the dinner were reserved and a ballot was held for the remaining 136, with tickets at 2 guineas, including wine and cigars.

As in 1902, a complete record of the centenary dinner was later placed in the archive. This reveals that dinner was duly served on Wednesday 28 May, with the inevitable *selle de mouton* as the main meat course.<sup>42</sup> In 1902 Arthur Balfour MP had proposed the vote of thanks at the OM dinner as the newly

elected prime minister. In 1924 the earl of Balfour, by now a trustee of the club, rose after dinner to propose the toast of ‘The Athenæum’, in a voice that was once described as being like a ‘silvery bell’.<sup>43</sup> He seized the opportunity to review the club’s early days, arguing that Croker was the true founder of the Athenæum and that he ‘did not deserve the full extent’ of the attacks upon him by three of the most powerful writers of his time who were all members of his club – Macaulay, Disraeli and Sir George Trevelyan – ‘considering the literary service he had done to his time and country’: the ‘unamiable strain of their criticism’ was, he said, ‘an unnecessary vengeance on his portrait and memory’.<sup>44</sup> Balfour struck the keynote of the evening when he pointed out that the Athenæum was unlike other clubs that had been formed under what he called a ‘Separatist System’, whereby men of letters consorted with men of letters, scientific men with scientific men, and so on. The idea of the Athenæum as a place where ‘different worlds met and associated in the common life of the common Club’ we owe entirely to the ‘originality and genius of John Wilson Croker’, he said. The strength of feeling in this statement reflects the magnitude of the injustice done to Croker and his memory both inside and outside the club since 1824. Balfour’s reassessment of Croker is echoed in Ward’s history of the club, written the following year, and in Cowell’s history of 1975, but is more strongly supported in the early chapters of this book.

The Centenary List of 1923 had included ‘men of such fully established reputation in Science, Literature, the Arts, Finance and Economics, Law, Professional life, or Public service in Church or State’, as we have seen. The categories of finance and economics, law and ‘professional life’ reflect the fact that the ordinary membership had always been drawn from a wide range of backgrounds.<sup>45</sup> When choosing speakers to respond to Balfour’s centenary toast, however, the Committee naturally turned to senior figures from the worlds of science, literature and the arts – the categories specified in the club’s foundational documents – and of ‘public service’, which had been added as a criterion for election under Rule II in 1848.<sup>46</sup> First came the president of the Royal Society, the physiologist Sir Charles Sherrington, who was admitted to the Order of Merit in 1924, published a slim volume of verse in 1925 and was a trustee of the British Museum.<sup>47</sup> Scientific men, he said, ‘had enjoyed many dinners and consumed much tobacco in the Club House, in the card room

## A ROOMFUL OF OWLS

they had held both good hands and bad, they were even reported occasionally to have slept in the chairs; they had indeed behaved very much as other members; they had in short felt at home'.<sup>48</sup> Like Balfour he celebrated the drawing together of men from science, letters, arts and public service, who 'learned one from another'.

Rudyard Kipling had declined an invitation to speak at the centenary dinner,<sup>49</sup> as was usual with him; so it was Sir Henry Newbolt who replied on behalf of literature. Newbolt elaborated Sherrington's theme, saying that 'We were here for giving and taking, for mutual pleasure, help, information and contradiction which we got from one another – in short, for the sake of common life. Such a Society, as well as Literature, had the same problem to solve – they both had to unite freedom with consideration, independence with interdependence, commonness with refinement'.<sup>50</sup> He then linked this need for balance with the definition of a gentleman, a subject that had preoccupied the late Victorians and the Edwardians, and that had always been an unspoken criterion for election to the Athenæum:

There was a phrase in Tacitus which might be taken as a motto both for life and for Literature – *Dignitatis suæ, Libertatis alienæ, memor* – 'never forgetful of his own dignity or of the rights of others'. It was said of a particular Roman, but it might serve as the definition of a gentleman. At any rate, it described exactly the likeness which existed between our life here and the great human Society of Literature – the perpetual effort to keep a perfect balance between familiarity and dignity. The aim that was set before us by our Founders was this combination of common life and personal distinction, and so long as we kept it in view, so long we should be on the way to realising the type of the ideal Club.

Newbolt was speaking two years after the *annus mirabilis* of English literary Modernism, with the publication of T.S. Eliot's *Waste Land* and James Joyce's *Ulysses*, a novel that gleefully upsets the 'balance between familiarity and dignity': his conservative views are those of an urbane and deeply patriotic 'Georgian'.<sup>51</sup>

Newbolt was to have been followed by the president of the Royal Academy. Sir Aston Webb was unable to attend, however, having been badly injured in a

traffic accident on his way home from an Academy dinner, and so his fellow architect, Sir Reginald Blomfield, stood in as the speaker on behalf of the arts. Part of his speech was devoted to an attack upon Impressionism, Cubism, Futurism, Vorticism ‘and the reduction ad absurdum of the whole thing, non-representative art’.<sup>52</sup> What would the club’s many distinguished artists – Turner, Chantrey, Lawrence, Leighton, Millais, Burne-Jones and others – have thought of these works which ‘the enthusiasm of dealers and the ingenuity of journalists sought to impose on the public as masterpieces’? Blomfield argued that the real remedy was a ‘wider culture, knowledge and understanding of the past, the knowledge of the heart as well as of the head, and that Humanism which had been too often over-ridden by science and sometimes forgotten by Literature’. As the chairman had pointed out, he continued, the Athenæum was ‘founded as the home and headquarters of Humanism and in its hundred years of existence it had never failed of that high and honourable tradition’.

When Archbishop Davidson, the senior trustee, rose to offer the fourth and final response to Balfour’s toast ‘on behalf of Public Service’ he referred to W.E. Gladstone who, ‘for all his eminence, declined the honour of election to the Athenæum’.<sup>53</sup> Rather than bemoaning the club’s loss, Davidson, tongue in cheek, invited his fellow members to ‘think of the difference it would have made to him if he had been a member of this Club and think what he lost by his refusal to join the Athenæum’. Membership, he believed, ‘helped to break down the grooviness and narrowness’ of prosaic everyday life, and he felt ‘supreme thankfulness for what he at least found to be a gain – recreation – uplift – which was afforded by the Club of which they were so proud – a Club which is both the seedplot and cementing of friendships precious to them all’. All that remained after such a heartfelt tribute was for the toast to the chairman by Sir Edward Henry, retired chief commissioner of the Metropolitan Police and chairman of the Executive Committee, to be ‘carried with acclamation and musical honours’, and for Lord Balfour to make a brief reply, before proceedings ended.

Two months later the club continued its celebrations with a conversazione to which the king and queen had been invited. A significant number of Athenians – statesmen, presidents of learned societies, royal chaplains and medical advisors – moved in court circles, and the issuing of this invitation,

## A ROOMFUL OF OWLS

which was graciously declined, reflects the General Committee's view of the club's place within the British Establishment. On 3 June 1924 members and their guests, 'together with Honorary Members and their guests, and representatives invited from about 25 West-End Clubs, making a total of about 1100 persons, were received under the clock on the Grand Staircase by Lord Justice and Lady Warrington and Sir Edward and Lady Henry'.<sup>54</sup> Some of the treasures of the library, together with an old Candidates Book, the first minute book of the club and an old candidate's certificate, were displayed on the tables in the drawing room, together with specimens of the first service of china and plate, normally kept in the strong room. Photographic souvenir postcards of the drawing room (Plate 23) and the library were 'distributed about the House and were much appreciated, – about 400 of each having been taken by the guests'. Refreshments, provided by Messrs J. Lyons, were served at a buffet in the coffee room. No members of the press were admitted and no photographs taken, but a communication was sent to *The Times*, which duly covered the story.

The conversazione presented an opportunity to honour the club's musicians.<sup>55</sup> Sir Hugh Allen, director of the Royal College of Music, was asked to select a musical programme of compositions by past and present members, which was performed by the London Chamber Orchestra. Three musical knights – Sir Frederick Bridge, Sir Walter Parratt and Sir Charles Villiers Stanford – had died within eleven days of each other only three months earlier, in March 1924.<sup>56</sup> Bridge and Parratt were organists whose compositions were mainly of church music. Stanford's work was represented at the conversazione, however, together with that of Sir Arthur Sullivan, Sir William Sterndale Bennett and Sir Hubert Parry, all deceased, and two living composers, Edward Elgar and Sir Alexander Mackenzie.<sup>57</sup> Mackenzie, regarded in his day as Scotland's greatest composer, was cosmopolitan in his tastes but conservative in his compositions. This was also true of many of the club's writers and artists, as well as musicians, in the inter-war period, and at a time when the 'Englishness' of English music was being reasserted, Allen's other choices would have been generally welcomed by those who attended on 3 June.

The final celebratory event took place four days later – the staff ball, to which each member of staff could bring two guests.<sup>58</sup> All were received in the

## THE ATHENÆUM

drawing room by Captain Hankey and Sir Edward Henry, who gave a short speech of welcome. The various forms of entertainment that were offered to those who were still regarded as members of the servant class contrast markedly with earlier centennial solemnities:

The Coffee Room which was specially laid with parquet flooring, was used as a dancing hall, the music being provided by a small orchestra under Mr Percy Clark of Clapham. One end of the Drawing Room was fitted up for Progressive Whist; the North Library was furnished with a number of parlour games including ‘Ping-pong’, ‘Draughts’, ‘Halma’ etc, and the Morning Room was fitted up as a Buffet at which was served refreshments provided by Holys Supply Agency (the firm who had organised the service of the Dinner on May 28th). During an interval a short Concert was improvised in the Coffee Room and at the close of the evening, Mr Veale, one of the guests, asked for a vote of thanks to the Committee for generously providing the Ball, to Sir Edward Henry and Capt Hankey for being present, and to Mr Hill for undertaking the responsibility of the arrangements. This was received with great acclamation and the singing of ‘For They are Jolly Good Fellows’. The proceedings terminated at 11.30 with the National Anthem.

Once the parquet flooring and the ‘ping-pong’ had been taken away, normal services were resumed for a club which still included substantial numbers of members who excelled in the four areas represented by the speakers at the centenary dinner. Senior scientists of the post-war era included Sir Ernest (later Lord) Rutherford OM, Sir George Beilby, Sir David Prain, Sir Herbert Jackson, Sir Arthur Eddington OM and Sir James Jeans OM, all of whom were elected before they were knighted. Another scientific knight, the Nobelist Sir Frederick Hopkins OM, made a characteristically Athenian proposal in his presidential address to the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1933, when he ‘urged the formation of a “Solomon’s House” of the wisest (men) in the land who would assemble to synthesise knowledge, appraise its progress and assess its impact on society’.<sup>59</sup>

Ten of the club’s best-known writers of the inter-war period – Thomas Hardy OM, Sir Rider Haggard, Joseph Conrad, Sir J.M. Barrie OM, Sir Henry

## A ROOMFUL OF OWLS

Newbolt, Rudyard Kipling, W.B. Yeats OM, Sir John Galsworthy OM, G.K. Chesterton and Sir John Buchan (Baron Tweedsmuir from 1935) – were born in the years between 1840 and 1875 and died between 1924 and 1940. Four of them were admitted to the Order of Merit, still virtually an Athenian preserve, two were Companions of Honour (Newbolt and Buchan) and three were Nobelists – Kipling, Galsworthy and Yeats, who was elected under Rule II in 1937. ‘It is, I fear, too expensive for me’, he confessed to Lady Dorothy Wellesley, ‘but as election under that rule is looked on as a great honour I join for a year at any rate.’<sup>60</sup> Yeats added that he had ‘always had a childish desire to walk up those steps & under that classic façade – it seems to belong to folk lore like “London Bridge” & that is my subject’. He was enchanted by the library.

Among a younger generation of writers, born in the 1880s, were Alfred Noyes, A.A. Milne, Sir Hugh Walpole, Michael Sadleir, Aldous Huxley and T.S. Eliot. Honours came late to Eliot: his OM and Nobel prize were awarded in 1948 and membership of the Athenæum the following year, when he was sixty. By contrast, Huxley was elected in January 1922 at the age of twenty-seven, by which time he had published four volumes of poetry and his first novel, *Chrome Yellow*.<sup>61</sup> Huxley used the clubhouse during the day in the summer of 1927, when staying with an aunt in Hampstead, and returned frequently when in London.<sup>62</sup> A member of a distinguished club dynasty, he revisited controversies that had engaged his forebears and that were now relevant in new and alarming ways. In his ‘note on eugenics’ (1927) he addressed a theme that had often been discussed in Galton’s clubhouse<sup>63</sup> and that was soon to become a hideous reality in Nazi Germany. The ‘socially efficient and the intellectually gifted’, he argued, ‘are precisely those who are not content to be ruled, but are ambitious either to rule or to live in an anti-social solitude. A state with a population consisting of nothing but these superior people could not hope to last for a year.’<sup>64</sup> In *Brave New World* (1932), as much a critique of Utilitarianism as it is of eugenics, one of the club’s original members is recalled in the ‘Malthusian belts’ that are used for carrying contraceptives and the Athenæum in the erotic ‘Aphroditeum’ club, the latest in a long line of plays on the club’s name, such as the ‘Palladium’, the ‘Dinatherium’ club, the ‘Pathénæum’ and the ‘Asineum’.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, Charles Larcom Graves’s description of the ‘Megatherium’ club during refurbishment, in ‘Changes in Club-land’

## THE ATHENÆUM

(*Punch*, 1920), anticipates Huxley: it is being decorated a pale pink outside and a sumptuous dormitory is being built on the top floor, where ‘slow music will be discoursed every afternoon’.<sup>66</sup>

Sir Reginald Blomfield, a ‘genial figure in the billiard-room of the Athenæum up to the last’,<sup>67</sup> published his trenchant views on Modernism ten years after his centenary speech in a book entitled *Modernismus* (1934). Here he attacked R.H. Wilenski’s ‘devastating assertions’ in *The Meaning of Modern Sculpture* ‘on the validity of Greek sculpture as we know it’. ‘For myself’, Blomfield wrote, ‘I hold to the Platonic Idea of beauty as the best working hypothesis, both for the practice and the criticism of art: that is to say, that beauty is absolute, in the sense that what is once beautiful is always beautiful, given the necessary intelligence to see it’.<sup>68</sup> It is now assumed, he argues:

that man can suddenly divest himself of his inherited instincts, and shift his emotions from one point of view to its exact opposite, so that, at the word of command, the man who has hitherto delighted in the Hermes of Praxiteles, or the Venus of Cyrene, will find himself enraptured by the Genesis of Mr. Epstein or the “Compositions” of Mr. Henry Moore; and the admirers of Turner or Constable will transfer their admiration to M. Picasso or M. Braque or M. Matisse.<sup>69</sup>

Both Henry Moore and Jacob Epstein, whose *Night and Day* had been the subject of an hysterical rant by Blomfield in 1928, were to be elected to the Athenæum, but only much later in their careers, when Moore was in his sixties (1963) and Epstein in his seventies (1955).<sup>70</sup> Blomfield’s views were echoed years later by Sir Alfred Munnings, who was knighted and brought into the club on his election to the presidency of the Royal Academy in 1944, and who scandalised the art world in 1949 with his hour-long diatribe at an Academy dinner on those ‘foolish daubers’, Cézanne, Matisse and Picasso, whose influence had defiled British tradition.<sup>71</sup> The artist and art administrator Sir William Rothenstein, who served as chairman of the club’s Art Committee in 1935–36, was himself unmoved by post-Impressionism. By this time the club’s policy of displaying portraits and other works of art on the walls of the clubhouse had encouraged the artists among the membership to donate original works, thus

## A ROOMFUL OF OWLS

introducing what has been described as ‘an entirely new dimension’ to the Athenæum Collection, which contains original works by Mervyn O’Gorman, D.S. MacColl, formerly keeper of the Tate Gallery, and by his friends, Philip Wilson Steer and Henry Tonks (both non-members), Rothenstein himself, Max Beerbohm, A.M. Hind, Charles March Gere, Randolph Schwabe and Francis Dodd.<sup>72</sup>

Rothenstein was one of the most active Academicians in the clubhouse. Six years after his election in 1925 he recorded that, having been a member of the Savile Club for some years, he had never thought of joining the Athenæum, believing it to be a club for the ‘solemnly eminent’.<sup>73</sup> When he was elected under Rule II, however, he ‘could not but accept membership’ and was ‘soon disabused of the idea of the solemnity of the Athenæum’: ‘it became a second home for me, where I enjoy converse with men of varying pursuits’. Among the many writers and artists who were proposed by Rothenstein, the most popular proved to be his close friend Max Beerbohm, another member of the Savile (since 1899), whose cartoons of ‘Club Types’ in *The Strand Magazine* (1892) had included a bespectacled intellectual from the Athenæum (Plate 28). Beerbohm was presented to the General Committee in 1929 as the author of *A Christmas Garland* (in which eight of the parodies are of Athenian writers), *Seven Men, Caricature of Twenty-five Gentlemen, Book of Caricatures, Rossetti and his Circle* and other works, and was duly elected under Rule II.<sup>74</sup> Beerbohm was seconded by Newbolt. The Athenæum had previously admitted comic writers and cartoonists, but in honouring Beerbohm in this way they recognised ‘the greatest caricaturist of the kind – that is, portrayer of personalities – in the history of art’, as Edmund Wilson was to describe him.<sup>75</sup> Beerbohm himself regarded Oscar Wilde and W.M. Thackeray as the main influences upon his writing, and said that Thackeray, the archetypal literary clubman and an Athenian, had given him ‘an ideal of well-bred writing’.<sup>76</sup> A further clue to Beerbohm’s acceptance in the club, and to his enjoyment of his membership, lies in T.S. Eliot’s observation that he was ‘the defence and illustration of the benefits to a writer of the discipline of the classics’.<sup>77</sup>

Many of the writers and artists who crossed the Athenæum’s ‘classic façade’ still shared a classical background with those in ‘the Public service in Church or State’. On certain matters, however, the latter group were more conservative

than the former, as Beerbohm knew when he proposed Lytton Strachey for membership under Rule II. Only a man who was universally liked would have risked saying, in a letter to members of the General Committee, that unless Strachey was admitted he would resign ‘as a protest against the doltishness of a Committee that prefers essentially unimportant big-wigs to a man of genuine distinction’.<sup>78</sup> ‘I should greatly miss the Athenæum, which I love’, he added, ‘but my love for the art of English prose is even deeper; and I should delight in my self-sacrifice in its cause! Strachey, presented as the author of *Landmarks in French Literature*, *Eminent Victorians*, *Queen Victoria*, *Elizabeth and Essex* and other works, and seconded by his fellow Cambridge Apostle ‘Goldie’ Lowes Dickinson, succeeded at the third election in 1931.<sup>79</sup> Sir John Reith, who was present at all three meetings, would have regarded himself as far too important a big-wig to take offence, although he may well have been uneasy about honouring a man of the ‘Oscar Wilde type’. Beerbohm had made his case for Strachey, however, on the basis of classical literary standards laid down by earlier generations. In campaigning for Strachey he also sought to preserve the prestige of Rule II membership, when each of the ‘stodgers’ on the Committee had ‘some stodgy old friend whom he wants to get in under Rule II, some Major General or Minor Canon or Chemist (and possibly Druggist’).<sup>80</sup> Beerbohm assured Strachey that he would like the Athenæum, as it had ‘a real charm of its own’: ‘Though solid and staid and tranquil, as a club should be, it is also a very genial place.’ (Maurice Bowra, the Oxford classicist who described himself as a member of ‘the Immoral Front’,<sup>81</sup> was also elected in 1931, and the decidedly unstaid Dadie Rylands of King’s College Cambridge, a close friend of Strachey’s, in 1932.)

Like two of the previous speakers at the centenary dinner, Archbishop Davidson had been a substitute: the prime minister, Ramsay MacDonald, was invited to speak on behalf of public service, but had to decline.<sup>82</sup> Four months earlier MacDonald had figured in a political fantasy in *Punch* by its editor, Seaman, in which Asquith and Baldwin meet secretly in the billiard room of the Athenæum to discuss the general election of 6 December 1923 and the resulting hung parliament, in the absence of MacDonald, who is ‘not a member of the Club – at present’.<sup>83</sup> More recently he had been elected under Rule XII on 4 March 1924, as a cabinet minister,<sup>84</sup> and had made an ill-fated first visit

## A ROOMFUL OF OWLS

to the clubhouse which provided material for a gossip column. Unfortunately he had not been briefed on the rules governing guests, rules that were now so complicated that a sheet of ‘Tabulated particulars of public rooms’ was produced internally, indicating times and days of the week, room by room.<sup>85</sup> On 16 March the *Sunday Express* announced that:

The Prime Minister’s first venture into the Athenæum Club after his unanimous election as an honorary member produced quite a nice little comedy.

Mr. MacDonald, naturally enough, took a guest with him to lunch. But it was Tuesday.

If it had been Saturday or Sunday, and twenty-four hours’ notice had been given, the Premier would not have had to fly incontinently from the club elsewhere.<sup>86</sup>

The first Labour prime minister was the illegitimate son of a farm servant and a ploughman, and was quick to take offence, even from an over-zealous waiter. The club’s embarrassment was compounded by the *Express* reporter’s statement that a friend of his had told him that Sir Richard Gregory, ‘when he heard of the awkward incident, announced his intention of going to the House of Commons and inviting Mr. MacDonald to dine at the Athenæum – the tacit suggestion being that the prime minister might feel some diffidence about re-entering the sacred portals’.

Consternation at the club and a flurry of letters. Gregory, himself the son of a cobbler and a friend and colleague of MacDonald’s, had been elected to the Athenæum in 1919, the year in which he was knighted and became the editor of *Nature*. In an anguished letter to the secretary he explained that on the evening of the incident he had related it to the poet and educationalist Alfred Graves, a member, and to Graves’s son, whom he thought was also a member.<sup>87</sup> Gregory therefore assumed that the conversation in the smoking room was private. In fact Charles Graves worked for the *Express* and was not a member. Graves senior wrote to the chairman the same day, giving his son’s name and address in case they wished to express their ‘strong resentment’ at the action he had taken; and the managing editor of the newspaper wrote a gracious letter of apology to Graves, sharing ‘the breach, if any, of good faith’.

## THE ATHENÆUM

Although the matter was upsetting for all concerned, the General Committee was grateful for the ‘frank exposure of the indiscretion’ and Ramsay MacDonald was soon to be seen regularly in the clubhouse, lunching quietly with non-political friends and having a ‘touching respect for writers and painters’.<sup>88</sup>

To outsiders the Athenæum still seemed a place of ‘reserve and dignity’, of ‘solemnity’ and ‘austerity’; and for many observers, particularly those living overseas, its aloof distinction epitomised the British governing classes. Take, for example, Herbert W. Horwill’s account of Ramsay MacDonald’s election to the club in the *Baltimore Sun* of 12 April 1924, headed ‘MacDonald makes his bow to clubland’:

The Athenæum, most respectable of British institutions, has invited the Labor premier to share its exclusiveness. There is no more piquant indication of the silent revolution that has just been accomplished in England than the unanimous election of a Labor Premier as member of the Athenæum Club. It remains only for Oxford to give Mr. MacDonald the hallmark of its honorary D.C.L., and the acceptance of the new régime as part of the established order will be complete.

. . . For sheer respectability there is nothing in England to beat the Athenæum Club.<sup>89</sup>

If Horwill knew about MacDonald’s first visit, he chose not to mention it.

An aura of respectability was created not only by the presence of the bishops and the permanent officials who ran the country from Whitehall, but also of those in public service who played significant advisory role on the basis of their specialist knowledge. Consider, for example, what Beveridge described as the ‘Bloomsbury battle’ on behalf of London University.<sup>90</sup> Once Rockefeller money had been promised in 1927, pressure was applied to the duke of Bedford to sell enough land to accommodate an ambitious building programme on the site. Among the academics and administrators who supported the project were several current and future members of the Athenæum. Eustace Percy, president of the Board of Education and later elected to the club and raised to the peerage, was asked to persuade Stanley Baldwin, the prime minister and himself a member, to write to the duke; William McCormick, chairman of the University Grants

Committee and a member, was petitioned to recruit Lord Balfour to the cause; Frederic Kenyon, director of the British Museum and a member since 1908, was asked for his support; and both Gregory Foster, provost of University College, and Sir Holburt Waring, chairman of London University's Finance Committee, both members, contributed to the effort. Beveridge, the main networker in the project, described how the securing of the site and the closing of roads that ran across it became a practical issue, and that he found himself working with 'well-tried allies' in the London County Council, including the chief education officer, Sir George Gater, a future member. He later also praised the contributions of Edwin Deller, a future member and founding principal of London University, John Hatton, principal of East London College and a member, and Charles Holden, who was appointed as architect to the project and would be elected to the club in 1946.

John Maynard Keynes used to speak of 'the ins', the 'politicians, officials, administrators and educated readers of the weekly journals who ran or participated in public life'.<sup>91</sup> The BBC had been led since its inception by one of the leading 'ins' of the period, John Reith, whose formidable energies as a committee man were expended in the public domain and at the Athenæum. Having managed the British Broadcasting Company, he became the first director-general when the organisation became a corporation with a royal charter in 1926. The following year he was knighted – recording in his diary that an 'ordinary knighthood' was 'almost an insult', considering what he had achieved<sup>92</sup> – and was elected to the club under Rule II. Some of his colleagues at the BBC subsequently felt that his views on programmes 'sometimes owed less to what he had heard over the air than to what he had over the lunch table'.<sup>93</sup> Soon he was making his presence felt on the General Committee and the Executive Committee, of which he was deputy chairman in the 1930s. The man who startled one interviewee at the BBC by first asking whether he accepted the 'fundamental teachings of Jesus Christ' succeeded in persuading the club that the Moderator of the Church of Scotland could be elected as an honorary member during his year of office.<sup>94</sup> It is questionable whether an offer from William Holman Hunt's widow to lend the club the strangest of his large religious paintings, *The Miracle of the Sacred Fire in the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem*, would have been accepted had Reith not been in the chair when the Executive Committee met in July 1931.<sup>95</sup> Although Reith

attended most of the meetings that year, even he had to confess that his official duties would not permit him to succeed Major General Sir Frederick Maurice as chairman of the Executive Committee in 1933.<sup>96</sup> Nevertheless, three years later he was still active in the Committee, arranging for one of his staff to work for a week at the clubhouse in order to establish an efficient office filing system, and taking the chair in March 1936 when Herr von Ribbentrop, the German ambassador, was invited to be an honorary member, together with other foreign representatives attending a conference at St James's Palace.<sup>97</sup>

Another leading committee man, Lord Macmillan (Hugh Pattison), seemed unable to resist an invitation to chair yet another commission or advisory body, and as a law lord he was considered to be a man with 'too many irons in the fire'.<sup>98</sup> He served, for example, as chairman of the Court of London University (1929–43), the Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children (1928–34), the King George V Memorial Fund and the Advisory Council of the BBC (1936–40), as well as the General Committee of the Athenæum (1935–45). Macmillan and four other members of the club played leading roles in the creation of the Pilgrim Trust, funded by the American philanthropist Edward Harkness. In his reminiscences Macmillan explains that Sir James Irvine, principal of the University of St Andrews, was a friend of Mr Harkness's. One day in 1930 Irvine spoke to Macmillan at the Athenæum and, 'without giving more than a hint of what was afoot', asked him to meet Harkness on his arrival in London.<sup>99</sup> Harkness duly hosted a dinner at Claridge's on 5 May at which Irvine, John Buchan (also a member of the club) and Macmillan were present. Two other members, Stanley Baldwin and Sir Josiah Stamp, the statistician and company director, were subsequently brought in to complete the inaugural board, and Buchan drafted the preamble to the Trust Deed, in which it was stated that Harkness's donation of £2 million (the same figure as Carnegie's Trust for the Universities of Scotland in 1901) was prompted by his 'admiration for what Great Britain had done in the 1914–18 war and, by his ties of affection for the land from which he drew his descent'. In 1936 Harkness dined with the trustees of the Athenæum, of which he was made an honorary member under the chairmanship of Lord Macmillan.<sup>100</sup>

During the inter-war period it was men such as Reith and Macmillan, serious men who applied their gifts to public service at a time of national reconstruction,

## A ROOMFUL OF OWLS

high unemployment and economic turmoil, who set the tone in Kipling's 'solemn halls' of the Athenæum, where there was no bar, let alone a cocktail bar (Plate 29).<sup>101</sup> When monthly 'Talk Dinners', as they came to be known, were first proposed in November 1926, the choice of subjects reflected the members' engagement with the pressing social and political issues of the day. The miners' strike that had led to the General Strike of May 1926 continued for a few further months. (In June, 'coal economy' allowed hot soup and fish to be available at the club but not hot joints.)<sup>102</sup> By the end of November most miners were back at work, having achieved little or nothing, and many remained unemployed. Rollo Appleyard, a consulting engineer, wrote to the General Committee on behalf of a group of members that included Mervyn O'Gorman, the wartime aeronautical engineer who was also known for his art works, and Joseph Pease, a barrister and writer on law, 'asking sanction from the Committee to arrange a monthly dinner for members and their guests on Mondays under conditions in contravention of existing regulations'.<sup>103</sup> These meetings would provide the opportunity to 'hold afterwards an informal discussion on some topic of general interest, the subject for discussion and the choice of a chairman for each evening to be arranged beforehand'. Sir Henry Newbolt would take the chair at the first dinner and no more than one or two guests were expected to be present. The Committee allowed two such dinners to be held and would 'decide thereafter to what extent the regulations should be amended'.

Knowing that they were breaking new ground, the steering group gathered the signatures of the twenty-three members and five guests who attended the first dinner in the morning room on 22 November 1926.<sup>104</sup> Sharing the top table with the chairman, Newbolt, and the principal speaker, Sir Austin Hopkinson, were those mentioned in the letter to the committee, together with Sir Martin Conway, director-general of the Imperial War Museum, and A.A.C. Swinton, one of five engineers attending the dinner, whose many letters to *The Times* on scientific subjects were generally written from the Athenæum.<sup>105</sup> Sir Austin's subject was 'Coal'.<sup>106</sup> In 1908 he had invented a revolutionary coal-cutting machine which was manufactured by his own engineering firm, where he was respected as a humane employer who lived frugally.<sup>107</sup> After war service as a trooper he had represented constituencies in present-day Greater Manchester as an Independent MP who disliked trade unionism and socialism, was forthright

## THE ATHENÆUM

in his speeches in the Commons and was in demand as a speaker outside the House. Following his talk there was a discussion to which seven members and guests contributed.

At the second dinner, held a month later, O’Gorman chaired Sir Herbert Stephen, clerk of assize for the Northern Circuit and the author of several books on the law, who opened a discussion on ‘Crime’ that was attended by thirty-eight members and five guests. The experiment had been a success, and monthly Talk Dinners continued the following year when Charles Larcom Graves of *Punch* (Alfred’s brother and a member of the General Committee) introduced a discussion on ‘The Old and the New Journalism’, the parliamentarian Sir Arthur Griffith-Boscawen on ‘Party Government’, Sir Richard Gregory on ‘The Influence of Science’ and Professor Arthur Eddington on ‘The Philosophical Tendencies of Modern Science’. The informality of the discussions extended to the dress code. When the secretary, Colonel Hankey, wrote to ask G.M. Trevelyan to open a discussion entitled ‘Is History a Science?’, in October 1929, he added: ‘As you have not, I think, attended any of these dinners previously, I should mention that the proceedings are quite informal; most members wear morning dress; the time is 7 for 7.15 p.m. and the proceedings are usually over at 10 o’clock. The price of the dinner is 7/6d exclusive of wine.’<sup>108</sup> The popularity of the dinners, due largely to the ‘unremitting care and thought’ of Appleyard, was duly noted at the AGM in 1930 and by November that year the demand for places had become so great that the coffee room was made available, with a ceiling of 130 in attendance, setting a pattern that is still followed today.<sup>109</sup>

Inevitably a sub-committee was established, which Appleyard chaired for five years. Cards were printed listing the dinners for the coming season. In 1932–33 most of the speakers were knights or peers. Although one or two lighter topics featured in the programme, such as ‘Music as Literature’, subjects such as ‘The Fruits of Sea-power’ and ‘Idle Men and Underworked Acres’ were more typical.<sup>110</sup> Sober subjects for sober times, from the Wall Street Crash of 1929 to Hitler’s rise to power in 1933, and at home the formation of a coalition government in order to deal with a failing economy and the challenges of slum clearance and unemployment, running at over 2.6 million by the end of 1931. At the Athenæum, the General Committee’s choices when appointing two new

## A ROOMFUL OF OWLS

trustees in 1929/30 were further signs of these testing times. The earl of Balfour resigned his membership on health grounds in November 1929.<sup>111</sup> First his brother Gerald was approached to replace him, which would have pleased the earl and secured a safe appointment, if not a brilliant one: as a politician Gerald Balfour was respected for his integrity, serenity and sound judgment, and was often consulted in private by Arthur. When the invitation was declined, the chairman wrote to Stanley Baldwin, the steady pipe-smoking ironmaster whose second premiership had ended in April 1929. Baldwin accepted, and between 1930 and 1947 the club had as a trustee the only prime minister in history to serve under three monarchs, and perhaps the most underestimated statesman of the modern era.

Archbishop Davidson's death in June 1930 precipitated a second search for a trustee that year. Lord Crawford and Balcarres was too busy with his personal affairs to serve, so in October three candidates were presented to the General Committee by its chairman, Lord Warrington: William Temple, who had been enthroned as Archbishop of York and elected to the club under Rule II only a year earlier, the painter Sir William Llewellyn, president of the Royal Academy and also elected in 1929, and the eminent physicist Sir Ernest Rutherford OM, president of the Royal Society and a member since 1917.<sup>112</sup> The Committee chose Temple, who accepted the honour but suggested that, as he could not spend long in London, they might wish to reconsider their decision. The fact that they did not indicates the strength of his support, for which there are several possible explanations, including his father's former prominence in the club, Archbishop Davidson's excellent record as a trustee and Temple's own attributes, not only a brilliant mind and strong social conscience but also great personal charm and a famous booming laugh. Above all, however, he was Archbishop of York, which meant that the club now had a primate and a premier, two bright stars in the Establishment firmament, as trustees.

Temple, who was to be translated to Canterbury in 1942, served as a trustee until his death in 1944, when he was succeeded by Geoffrey Fisher and subsequently Donald Coggan.<sup>113</sup> One of his most significant contributions in the social field was the commissioning of a report on unemployment entitled *Men without Work* (1938), produced with the help of a special committee and the Pilgrim Trust, that most Athenian of charitable foundations.<sup>114</sup> Other episcopal

members of the club who engaged with social issues included Dr Cyril Garbett, Bishop of Southwark from 1919, the first chairman of the religious advisory committee of the BBC in 1923, elected to the club in 1938 and Temple's successor as Archbishop of York in 1942. It was while at Southwark that Garbett published a pamphlet entitled *The Challenge of the Slums* (1933), urging the government to deal with overcrowding south of the river. Clearly some bishops had their uses, but the presence of so many in the club was felt to be oppressive in certain quarters. The literary scholar and historian Sir Walter Raleigh, for example, whose father was a Congregational minister, described the Edwardian club as a 'pool of Bethesda for Bishops' and commented in 1920 that 'we have plenty of bishops at the Athenæum', adding that he was in favour of exchanging them, 'at a low valuation, for junior Naval Officers'.<sup>115</sup>

By the mid-1930s there was to be an annexe to the 'Bishops' Mortuary', as Raleigh called the clubhouse. In 1935, seven years after the provision of bedrooms for members in the main building, Sir Frederic Kenyon chaired an EGM which rejected the proposed acquisition of a lease on 7 Carlton House Terrace and alterations made for its use as 'an annexe to the Club including a Drawing Room and a Dining Room in which member may entertain lady guests'.<sup>116</sup> The General Committee tried again the following March, when, in spite of Blomfield's protests, a fresh scheme for 6 Carlton Gardens was accepted by an EGM attended by about 220 members (Plate 30).<sup>117</sup> This large house, formerly owned by Gladstone ironically enough, provided five reception rooms, four bedrooms for members and ten maid-servants' bedrooms for twenty maids (thus releasing eight more bedrooms for members in the clubhouse).<sup>118</sup> Faded photographs and negatives in the club's archives reveal soft furnishings and modern furniture of a lightness that contrasts with Decimus Burton's classical (and masculine) furniture in the clubhouse. Yeats was pleased that, as a member of the club, he would now have somewhere to entertain Lady Dorothy Wellesley, and for twenty-five years some members and their wives found it most convenient.<sup>119</sup> In 1939, however, only three years after it opened, Sir Alan Barlow reported to an AGM that fewer than a fifth of the membership had used the annexe, in spite of good reports on the food and service provided there, and that the receipts from bedrooms were also disappointing.<sup>120</sup>

Meanwhile a steep decline in the number of candidates awaiting their turn for the ballot prompted further changes at the club. From a high point of over 1,500 candidates in the 1880s and 1890s the number had decreased to fewer than 250 by 1935, and half the members were now over sixty years of age.<sup>121</sup> In view of these statistics, and of poor attendance on ballot days, it was decided that elections should in future be the responsibility of the General Committee. A loose-leaf Supporters' Book was ordered and the Committee prepared to consider the next sixty candidates on the list for election.<sup>122</sup> A wide range of backgrounds among the Committee members was now essential. Lord Macmillan was in the chair for the first election on 7 January 1936.<sup>123</sup> Among the eighteen other members present were Alan Barlow, civil servant; Sir William Bragg, physicist; Sir Frederic Kenyon, Greek scholar and museum director; Sir Edwin Lutyens, architect; Sir Henry Lyons, geologist and museum director; John Mackail, classical scholar, literary critic and poet; Sir John Reith, director-general of the BBC; Sir William Rothenstein, artist and art administrator; and Marmaduke Tudsbury, consulting engineer. Once the chairman had explained the procedure, 'each Candidate was submitted separately with a statement of qualification by the Election Secretary together with a précis of the confidential correspondence', a convention that is still followed today. Being the first election of its kind, care was taken over the minuting of decisions that set precedents for later meetings. Of the eighteen men elected on a show of hands, two were 'advanced candidates', older men whose waiting period had been shortened. The process of rejecting a candidate is described in some detail. When the name of Sir James Purves-Stewart was reached, the chairman received a motion, which was duly seconded, 'that this candidate be not elected'. The motion was carried unanimously and the secretary was directed 'not to make any communication to the candidate in accordance with the usual practice that only in the case of satisfactory election is any notice sent to a candidate'. Sir James, an advanced candidate, born in 1869, was a distinguished neurologist whose publications included a medical book that ran through ten editions. Discussions in the General Committee were confidential and unminuted, but it is reasonable to suppose that his reputation for volubility and 'gesticulations that seemed hardly native' on ward rounds weighed heavily with the Committee.<sup>124</sup> He also held controversial views on voluntary euthanasia and on the administration of euthanasia by physicians.<sup>125</sup>

Far more controversial were the views of the anthropologist George Pitt-Rivers, yet he was duly elected at this first meeting. A respected scientist and agriculturist, educated at Eton and Oxford, Pitt-Rivers had strong associations with the club. In *The Clash of Culture and the Contact of Races* (1927), where he argued that the mixing of races leads to group or national destruction, he had referred to the work of a number of Athenians, including his grandfather, General Augustus Pitt-Rivers, Francis Galton, Sir James Frazer and Lord Balfour.<sup>126</sup> He had been proposed by Professor Reginald Gates, the botanist and geneticist, and seconded by Sir Arthur Keith, museum curator and palaeo-anthropologist.<sup>127</sup> Both eminent supporters were to be criticised for their published work on race and heredity at a time when these were highly sensitive subjects. Whereas Gates became convinced, however, that the ‘simplistic hereditary theories of the Fascists and Nazis were political rhetoric rather than rigorous science’,<sup>128</sup> Pitt-Rivers’s racial theories and right-wing politics were intertwined and were reinforced as he became infatuated with Hitler and Nazism in the mid-1930s.<sup>129</sup> In 1936 questions were raised in the club regarding his ‘unconventional attire’, but whether this included the gold swastika badge that he later affected in Clubland is unclear.<sup>130</sup> In *The Czech Conspiracy: A phase in the World-War plot* (1938) Pitt-Rivers described Hitler as a simple soldier, a great statesman, the leader of his people, a man of destiny, ‘yes, and a friend of England’.<sup>131</sup> In his Prologue he referred to Gilbert Murray, classicist, internationalist and Athenian, who had written to him in a ‘somewhat jocular tone’: ‘It is sad that the Jews have so much influence over the Conservatives, the Bishops and the Cecil family, but I am still more disturbed at the rumour I hear of the control exercised by the devil-worshipping Yezidis over the Wessex farmers and the Pitt-Rivers family. How little we suspected these things when we had that pleasant dinner together.’<sup>132</sup> And at the end of *The Czech Conspiracy* Pitt-Rivers reprinted a letter to *The Times* which deprecated ‘the attempt which is being made to sabotage an Anglo-German rapprochement by distorting the facts of the Czecho-Slovak settlement’. Four other members of the club – Douglas Jerrold, Professor Arthur Pillans Laurie, the marquess of Londonderry and Arthur Rogers – were co-signatories.<sup>133</sup>

Lord Londonderry was entertained by Nazi leaders during his private visits to Germany in 1936–38 and reciprocated by inviting the German ambassador,

## A ROOMFUL OF OWLS

Joachim von Ribbentrop, to his family estates in Durham and Northern Ireland. While Ribbentrop, known as the Londonderry Herr by society wags and ‘Brickendrop’ by his British counterparts, was converting his gracious embassy at numbers 8 and 9 Carlton House Terrace into a Nazi stronghold full of bored SS men,<sup>134</sup> he was also enjoying his honorary membership of the Athenæum, just a few steps away, to which he had been elected as a matter of course.<sup>135</sup> There he had access to a wide range of views on Hitler’s Germany, from Londonderry’s on the right to Bishop George Bell’s on the left. Many of those on the right, including Londonderry and Bishop Arthur Headlam, were motivated by a strong antipathy to socialism in general and Bolshevism in particular, against which fascism seemed to offer a powerful defence. With the outbreak of war the German ambassador was withdrawn and Pitt-Rivers was one of around 750 British fascists and fellow-travellers to be interned under defence regulation 18B, which may explain why he was late paying his annual subscription to the club.<sup>136</sup> Meanwhile another member had obeyed his masters in Moscow, penetrating this citadel of the English governing class by feigning extreme right-wing views and working his way upwards in the Secret Intelligence Service. His name was Kim Philby.



Part IV

# 'MORE THAN JUST ANOTHER LONDON CLUB'

(1939–)





## 'THE SECRET POWER OF ENGLAND'

In 1947, five years after his election to the Athenæum, the patriotic historian Arthur Bryant published a florid piece in the *Illustrated London News* on the 'historic clubs of London', the 'sheltered abodes of men of polished dignity and assurance'.<sup>1</sup> 'I know of nowhere', he wrote, 'not even the officers' mess of a great regiment, where the secret power of England is so clearly revealed. Hitler, who never entered one of these ancient temples, had already – though he knew it not – met his doom in them before he crossed his Polish Rubicon.' Bryant rehearses the point made by Sir Charles Waldstein (later Walston) thirty years earlier when he contrasted the Kaiser's ideology of *Kultur* with the 'Hellenic ideal of life' embodied in the cultured English gentleman.<sup>2</sup>

In the final section of this book we test Sir Percy Faulkner's claim in 1974, when he was chairman of the General Committee, that the Athenæum is 'more than just another London club'.<sup>3</sup> The current chapter, which considers the Second World War and its aftermath, reveals that the clubhouse provided a meeting place for those members whose contribution to the war effort kept them in London in 1939, as it had in 1914, and for those engaged in new debates on economic and moral reconstruction which arose before war broke out, continued throughout hostilities and shaped the national agenda in 1945. In the case of Bryant's and Waldstein's own club, the 'secret power of England' was to be found in the lives and work not only of its leading politicians and serving officers who ran the war and became household names, but also its moralists, theologians and economists who applied their minds to the demands of a future peace. Crucial to the war effort were those less well-known civil

## THE ATHENÆUM

servants and intelligence officers, scientists and engineers who used the clubhouse to which Andrew Cowan referred in a post-war broadcast for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. ‘I hate to think’, he said, ‘what would have happened if a bomb had landed on the building at lunch time when it was filled with most of the “back room boys” of the British Empire.’<sup>4</sup>

One particular night raid was recalled during the club’s AGM in 1947, when Sir Edmund Brocklebank, one of the many Conservative MPs who had lost their seats in the Labour landslide of 1945, spoke in support of proposed improvements to staff facilities in the clubhouse. The minutes report Sir Edmund’s description of

an ugly night during the war when the Carlton Club was bombed, the Union Club and the German Embassy were in flames, and Athene rocked. The Travellers too was on fire and this was put out by hoses from the Athenæum. Bombed out people came to the Club and were given food and shelter during the night. In spite of this, breakfast was served to the members punctually at 8.30 a.m. next morning. Sir Edmund said that he felt the Members all owed the Staff a deep debt of gratitude and he welcomed the proposed improvement in the Staff amenities and arrangements, which had not been altered since the time of Decimus Burton.<sup>5</sup>

The motion was carried unanimously.

The Carlton’s clubhouse, then to the west of the Reform’s on Pall Mall, suffered a direct hit, possibly from two almost simultaneous bombs, at about 8.30 p.m. on 14 October 1940.<sup>6</sup> Harold Macmillan, Douglas Hogg (Lord Hailsham) and his son, Quintin Hogg, were among those who emerged from the ruins. Sir William Beveridge was at the Reform that night and was first under the table.<sup>7</sup> Refugees from the Travellers were later offered hospitality at White’s, at the top of St James’s Street. From 7 September 1940 London was bombed on fifty-seven consecutive days and, like other Londoners, the clubmen of St James’s helped each other through these critical times. On the afternoon of 14 October the Executive Committee of the Athenæum directed that no more than sixteen members should sleep in the members’ air-raid shelter in the basement, and that ‘no-one should sleep in the Lavatory’.<sup>8</sup> Most

of the windows were broken that night, but fortunately the glass did no damage owing to the 'cellophane and protective solution' that had been applied.<sup>9</sup>

Defensive measures had first been introduced during the invasion scare of September 1938, when a gas refuge was prepared in the basement for members and staff, two of whom were given the full decontamination course while seventeen others were trained as air-raid wardens.<sup>10</sup> In the summer of 1939 uncertainty about the nature of the threat if war were to be declared resulted in rapid changes of policy on possible closure in the Executive Committee, chaired by Sir Alan Barlow.<sup>11</sup> During the 'phoney war' that autumn, male members of staff who were engaged in fire-fighting duties used the smoking room as a dormitory and female staff slept at the annexe.<sup>12</sup> Early in 1940, having recommended that the club's mirrors be treated with rubber solution, the Executive Committee estimated the cost of emergency arrangements in case of the need to close.<sup>13</sup>

In fact the clubhouse remained open throughout the war years. So great were the dangers associated with this policy, and so frequent were enforced adaptations to wartime conditions, that Annual Reports were supplemented with interim reports in October or November from 1940 to 1944. These reports informed members of the latest changes to regulations relating to rationing, meal times, the black-out and the closure of rooms in the evenings, as well as news of further defensive measures, such as the bricking up of the two large windows in the front hall, and of the number of incendiary bombs on the roofs of the clubhouse and the annexe that had been extinguished by the club fire-fighting squads, made up of members and staff.<sup>14</sup> Serious bomb damage recurred in the vicinity of the clubhouse. In February 1944, for example, four high explosive bombs damaged an area of 6 acres between Jermyn Street and Pall Mall. Alongside news of the casualties (nine dead, forty-eight injured) was one of the bizarre twists that characterised many such accounts: one bomb fell on Pall Mall itself, opposite a taxidermist's establishment, 'scattering a disquieting heterogeneity of stuffed beasts into the street'.<sup>15</sup> Later that year the interim report recorded that the clubhouse and the annexe had 'mercifully been spared damage by Flying Bombs, beyond the breaking of windows'.<sup>16</sup> A photograph taken at the end of the war (Plate 31) shows a pockmarked clubhouse and a corner of the aboveground splinter shelter that had been built in Waterloo Place by Westminster City Council in the spring of 1940 to accommodate 1,050 people.<sup>17</sup>

Concern for the safety of the Athenæum Collection was first expressed in June 1940, when the club's valuable bust of Pope by Rysbrack was removed to the basement.<sup>18</sup> In November 1941 it was reported that All Souls College, Oxford, was 'generously storing some of the Club port', and that several thousand of the most valuable library books, the 'principal Art Treasures' and the most important records, such as early ballot books, had been dispersed to the country houses of members who offered to accommodate them for the duration of the war.<sup>19</sup> Sir Follett Holt, chairman of the Entre Ríos Railways and the first chairman of the Tower Hill Improvement Trust, assured Robin Udal, the club secretary, that he could house a few cases in his squash court at Riffhams, Danbury in Essex, but could not guarantee that his barns were free from rats.<sup>20</sup> Some non-members also helped: two wooden cases of art treasures returned safely from Highclere Castle, Newbury, for example, owned by Lord Carnarvon, in July 1945.<sup>21</sup> By the spring of 1946 the librarian, Miss Eileen Stiff, could report that of the 16,600 books that had returned to the clubhouse, about 400, chiefly from the pamphlet collection, had been damaged by water, a few irreparably; the remainder had been rebound or repaired.<sup>22</sup>

Within the partly denuded clubhouse it was the familiar wartime story of keeping calm and carrying on. In May 1940 the General Committee, chaired by Lord Macmillan, noted that 'the usual Derby Sweep list' had been put up in the hall.<sup>23</sup> Four years later they thanked those members who had 'so generously lent pictures for the two loan exhibitions in the Guests' Luncheon Room', which had been 'much appreciated'.<sup>24</sup> Strange misjudgments of taste among the membership surfaced occasionally, however, as they did in peacetime. An Executive Committee minute of February 1940 reads: 'Offer by Sir Harold Wilberforce-Bell recently retired from the Punjab where he had served as Resident to present bison heads, not accepted'.<sup>25</sup> More often the minute books record timeworn concerns such as the shortage of shelf space. In July 1944 a special sub-committee on 'Library Accommodation' made some radical suggestions for additional shelving in the upper smoking room. The architect William Curtis Green, best known for his extensive work in Piccadilly in the 1920s, suggested that some 4,500 books could be accommodated 'by erecting on each side of the room two projecting spurs, each about six feet long and eighteen inches wide, with books on each side, dividing the room into three bays, with a clear view

down the middle'.<sup>26</sup> While this proposal, which would have made the smoking room more like a further library or reading room, was rejected, the report's more predictable recommendation was accepted: that the Library Committee should aim at 'disposing of not less than 3,500 books and as many more as is reasonable'. In 1945 the Library Committee, prompted by the General Committee, agreed to present 'certain sets of periodicals (many of them incomplete) to Libraries, some of which have been seriously damaged by enemy action'.<sup>27</sup> By donating periodicals that were said to have been more useful to the recipients than to themselves, the club was also releasing 'shelf space urgently needed'.

While valiant efforts were made to maintain the usual services during the war, many aspects of club life were adversely affected. Talk Dinners were suspended, for example, in both the clubhouse and the annexe, in October 1939.<sup>28</sup> In February 1940, one was held in the light luncheon room (now the picture room) as an experiment.<sup>29</sup> No more were held, however, until 1949.<sup>30</sup> In May 1940 only the General Committee and about fifty other members attended the AGM and it was decided that, during the war, the committee could select candidates for advanced election in excess of the number of twenty laid down in Rule III.<sup>31</sup> By October 1941 many names had been withdrawn from the Candidates Book, presumably for a variety of reasons associated with the war, and the number remaining had dropped to about 150, one-third of whom had asked to be considered for membership after the war.<sup>32</sup> With enough candidates for only one year's elections, members were encouraged to take 'immediate steps' to increase their number: election was likely to follow in only a year's time, and for advanced candidates after a few months.<sup>33</sup> In spite of 'war casualties, high taxation and the uncertainties of the time', the number of members rose. By the autumn of 1943 demand for the club's services had increased to the extent that the clubhouse was overcrowded; so the General Committee announced that they would elect fewer Rule III members the following year.<sup>34</sup> Their other concern was the 'apparent preponderance of candidates belonging to the medical profession' among the new members, an observation which was repeated in 1947 and from time to time up to the present day.<sup>35</sup> Medical professionals seem to be as gregarious as engineers and lawyers.

In its domestic economy the Athenæum's responses to the exigencies of war were often reminiscent of those recorded in 1914–18. Shortages led to all

kinds of restrictions, such as limiting the minutes of Executive Committee meetings to one sheet of paper and replacing tablecloths with table mats in the coffee room.<sup>36</sup> From November 1941 the drawing room and upper smoking room were closed after 7 p.m. in order to economise on light and fuel.<sup>37</sup> (The north and south libraries remained open.) Rationing affected the menu, as it did elsewhere. In one anecdote, however, Percy Colson, the historian of White's, managed to link two half-truths relating to the Athenæum's food and its bishops:

The food there has never been particularly good – perhaps owing to episcopal influence on the committee, and during the late war it was unspeakable. I lunched there in 1940 and after a revolting meal, my host said: 'Let's have a liqueur with our coffee to take away the taste of the food'. (The coffee, incidentally, had no recognizable taste.) We asked for Grand Marnier, Kummel, Cointreau, Benedictine – they had all disappeared, probably down the throats of the Bishops. Finally we managed to obtain a very inferior cooking brandy.<sup>38</sup>

Coffee, which had always been the subject of complaints, was now available on a self-service basis in urns to which spoons were attached by wires.<sup>39</sup> 'Wineless days' were reinstated in 1943 and the rules on alcohol became more complicated thereafter. In 1944 it was announced in the Annual Report that, 'owing to shortage of Wine stocks: - (a) Port may be served only in the Coffee Room. (b) Sherry may be served only the Sitting Rooms. (c) Whisky may be served only the Coffee Room, except after dinner. (d) Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays will continue to be wineless days, except for Port, Sherry and (while stocks last) Algerian Burgundy. (e) Spirits, beers, etc., can be served every day as hitherto.'<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile the club made donations of between 1 and 5 guineas to hospitals, and the members opened a Spitfire fund in September 1940, a more belligerent response than the ambulance fund in the First World War.<sup>41</sup>

As in 1914–18, members of staff who joined the services were given special treatment. In May 1940 it was decided that married members of staff with more than five years' service would have their pay and allowances made up to their current income when they were called up; that other cases would be

considered on their merits (in some cases *ex gratia* payments were made); and that places would be kept open for them as far as possible at the end of the war.<sup>42</sup> Staff shortages led to some mechanisation: a 'dish-washing machine' was acquired in April 1941 and 'towel machines and soap containers' were installed in the members' lavatories.<sup>43</sup> The loyalty and service of the staff were gratefully acknowledged throughout the war, by the end of which there was a new sense of mutual respect and comparative informality.<sup>44</sup> At an AGM held six days after the Germans' unconditional surrender, the secretary, Robin Udal, 'thanked Members most sincerely for the unfailing kindness and consideration shown to them [the staff] during the years of war, and said that this was the main reason for their being able to keep staff in face of the competition from hotels. He also thanked the Members for their great generosity in giving up the West Library as a Recreation Room for the Staff, and said that this was highly appreciated.'<sup>45</sup>

Udal occasionally gave his son lunch at the 'Secretary's window table' in the coffee room, and there was usually a brief tour during which the boy was introduced to members of staff before returning to boarding school.<sup>46</sup> John Oliver Udal, in adult life an assistant commissioner in the Sudan and a member of the club, offers a unique glimpse of wartime staff members in his reminiscences, naming figures such as Mr L.W. Middleton, who had been the hall porter for forty-seven years, and Mr H.G. Hendy the club chef, who wrestled below stairs with the problems of wartime rationing. Miss Sue Shipton, who was later to work for Lord Reith, was the first secretary to marry a member, Mr Philip Nicholls of the Treasury.

Udal adds that the staff were 'a happy team and, augmented by a few from the Orleans Club, were able to field a team under the leadership of Mr Harry Pfeiffer, Receiving Clerk, to win the Clubs' knock-out football competition', the final of which he witnessed with delight in Hyde Park.

The homes of 'more than twenty' members of staff were seriously damaged by bombing during the war.<sup>47</sup> In October 1944 it was reported that some 'American friends', who wished to remain anonymous, had provided funds to enable gifts of £5 each to be made to those who had suffered in this way. Records in the archives of the Athenaeum chronicle one leading establishment's response to a new kind of warfare. 'Hitler's War' saw fewer casualties among British servicemen and women than in the 'Great War', but many more among

civilians on the Home Front. It involved the whole population, marking a much more significant change in the course of history, and its battle cry was one of effort rather than of sacrifice.<sup>48</sup> Whereas thirteen members of staff had been killed in action in 1914–18, only one died on active service in the Second World War. Frederick Caveswell, who had been a drawing room waiter since 1929, was killed in November 1943 when serving overseas with the Rifle Brigade: the whole amount of the club contributions to his pension was paid to his widow.<sup>49</sup>

The membership, most of whom were again too old to be called up, suffered more as a result of bombing than on active service. The first announcement of casualties, in the interim report of November 1940, conforms to this pattern: ‘The Committee very much regret to report that Lt.-Col. Sir Arnold Wilson is missing, believed killed, and that Mr. W. Lionel Hichens and Dr. C.H. Merz have been killed by enemy action.’<sup>50</sup> Hichens, an industrialist and public servant, died when a bomb hit Church House on 14 October, the day that ‘Athene rocked’.<sup>51</sup> Charles Merz, the best electrical supply engineer of his generation, was killed the same night at his home in Kensington, along with his two children and two servants; his wife was injured but survived. Similarly Lord Stamp, the statistician and businessman, was killed with his wife and eldest son in his shelter at Shortlands in April 1941, and William Sclater, a curator at the Natural History Museum, died from his wounds after a V-1 flying bomb ‘fell over his home’ in Chelsea in July 1944. Stress also took its toll: Hugh Walpole’s biographer suggests that the writer, a diabetic, had been worn out by the blitz when he died in June 1941.<sup>52</sup>

Sir Arnold Wilson had become a pilot officer in October 1939 and then a rear-gunner with a bomber squadron: he died on 31 May 1940 at the age of fifty-five when his plane was shot down over France.<sup>53</sup> In the 1920s he had served as a colonial administrator in Mesopotamia and later published several books on the region. A devout Anglican, he had supported General Franco and met both Mussolini and Hitler in the 1930s, but his admiration for Hitler was tempered by a distaste for Nazi extremism. Colonel Jack Macnamara’s association with the Nazis was more intimate. Elected to the club in 1938, Macnamara was a homosexual Conservative MP with an espionage background and connections in the Hitler Youth; he had organised sex trips to Germany in

the mid-1930s with Guy Burgess, his parliamentary secretary and fellow member of the Anglo-German Fellowship.<sup>54</sup> Macnamara was killed in Italy while serving with the 'Black Cats' in December 1944: his commemorative shield hangs in the chamber of the House of Commons.

A third member to be killed in action was Richard Latham, a flying officer whose plane went down on a reconnaissance mission over the coast of Norway in August 1943; no trace of the missing aircraft or crew was found. A personal tribute in *The Times* referred to the war's 'merciless wastage of young men of the highest promise' and recorded that Latham would be 'missed at the Athenæum, and his gallant behaviour one night in trying to put out a fire in the middle of a blitz will never be forgotten'.<sup>55</sup> It is difficult to tell how many candidates died on active service, as in this war the phrase 'Killed in action' was no longer used in the Candidates Book, being replaced by the more anodyne 'Died' or 'Deceased'. A similar change in sensibility is noticeable in the commemoration of members' sons who had been killed in action. Sir Oliver Lodge's frequently reprinted book about his son Raymond, who was killed in 1915, is grounded in spiritualism's consolation of a life 'on the other side'.<sup>56</sup> In contrast, Michael Sadleir's *Tommy, 1916–1942*, printed in a limited edition of 105 copies in 1943, offers a this-worldly quotation from Pericles as an epitaph to his naval officer son, killed by a splinter from a German shell in the North Sea: 'He gave his body to the Commonwealth and received for his own memory the grandest of all sepulchres, not that in which his mortal bones are laid but a home in the hearts of men: and his story is not graven only on stone over his native earth, but lives on far away without visible symbol, woven into the stuff of other men's lives'.<sup>57</sup> In April 1946 the General Committee decided against putting up a roll of honour in the clubhouse. Their response to Victory Day had been equally muted: there were flambeaux, but no decorations, no dinner and no war service brooches for the female staff.<sup>58</sup>

Whereas the casualty list contrasted with that of 1914–18, when twelve members, thirteen servants and forty-seven candidates had been killed in action, the pattern of war work on the Home Front was similar, as was the clubhouse's function as a place of respite. The writer Hector Bolitho, who believed himself to be of partly Maori descent, later described life working and sleeping in the Air Ministry building in King Charles Street in 1940/41. After a night spent in

## THE ATHENÆUM

squalid conditions he would walk through St James's Park to the Athenæum, where he shaved, bathed, ate his breakfast and read the morning newspapers. 'I liked to sit in one corner of the drawing-room', he recorded:

near a revolving case of etchings by Charles Meryon [who] went to New Zealand in a French sloop, in 1842; he made many sketches of the colony, and . . . used some of them as subjects for his etchings. The print-case was by a window in the club, overlooking Waterloo Place. I could peer at the engraved outlines of the coast of my native land, with its graceful trees and ferns, and then suddenly glance beyond the window at Florence Nightingale, in bronze, and at the canyon of Pall Mall, coming to life after a night of fear.<sup>59</sup>

During the AGM in May 1940 Lord Macmillan commented from the chair that the club was 'serving a very useful public purpose as a meeting place for the large number of Members doing important National Work, where they could also find rest and relaxation from their arduous duties', a point that he reiterated in 1942.<sup>60</sup> As in 1914–18, several ministers in the war cabinet were members, including Neville Chamberlain (1938), Woolton (1939), Anderson (1942) and Attlee (1943).<sup>61</sup> (Bevin, Ismay and Halifax joined in the early 1950s.) There was also the usual tally of foreign diplomats who became honorary members during their time in London, the most significant of whom was Ivan Mikhailovich Maisky, the Russian ambassador and an important ally at a time when the Red Flag flew over Selfridges and *Soviet War News* was published from offices in Trafalgar Square.<sup>62</sup> Fifteen months after Maisky's election in September 1941 the BBC intercepted a message from the German broadcasting station purportedly based in Britain that featured a clichéd misrepresentation of the club. Entitled 'Aid to Russia: A Club conversation' and addressed to the workers, it reported the findings of 'our snoop' who 'went poking around the snooty clubs of the West End, suitably shaved and dolled up to look like one of the upper ten'.<sup>63</sup> The 'best bit of Capitalist conversation' was one that took place in 'that haunt of high hats, the Athenæum Club in Pall Mall'. It was between 'a trio of pot-bellied, purple-faced old aristocrats, and they were gossiping over the brandy and cigars': the third says, 'Hitler will soon

make the world safe for gentlemen. And the old sod gaffawed into his brandy. When they've finished cutting each other's throats and all Bolshies and Nazis and the rest of them have been slaughtered, there'll be peace again and prosperity, declared one of the trio.' The workers were reminded that, when sending aid to Russia, the government preferred to send too little rather than too much.

Some of the 'high hats' at the Athenæum applied their own literary skills to morale-boosting projects during the war. Sir Richard Gregory, for example, a former editor of *Nature*, published *British Scientists* (1941) in praise of famous men. Noël Coward, a member since 1937 and for a time engaged in intelligence work, was best known for the films that he made in collaboration with David Lean – *In Which We Serve* (1942), *This Happy Breed* (1943) and *Brief Encounter* (1945) – and 'Play Parade' which toured the country in 1942–43, featuring *Blithe Spirit*, *This Happy Breed* and *Present Laughter*.<sup>64</sup> In the first act of *Present Laughter*, Henry Lyppiatt complains about Garry Essendine's sherry, to which Garry, the Coward figure in the play, replies, 'You ought never to have joined the Athenæum Club, it was disastrous.' Henry: 'I really don't see why.' Garry: 'It's made you pompous.' Henry: 'It can't have. I've always been too frightened to go into it.'<sup>65</sup> In act III, however, he returns from the clubhouse with Morris Dixon to berate Garry for his night with Joanna Lyppiatt. 'False, friend! False, friend!', Morris exclaims ('*just a trifle intoxicated*'), to which Garry replies, 'Come come Morris, you're not in the Athenæum now.'<sup>66</sup>

A new phenomenon at the club was the election of exiled foreign leaders and their ministers, creating a veritable League of Nations there. The sequence of their election reflects the progress of the war. First there were the Poles, Sikorski and Zaleski, prime minister and president in exile, elected after the signing of a Polish-British Military Agreement in August 1940.<sup>67</sup> Dr Knežević, the minister of the royal court of Yugoslavia, accompanied the government into exile in London and was elected in October 1941.<sup>68</sup> Two months later Emmanouil Tsouderos, the Greek prime minister, was elected, together with General de Gaulle, leader of the Free French and often regarded as a tiresome presence in British military and government circles.<sup>69</sup> The fact that overcrowding in the clubhouse was given as a reason for limiting the number of honorary memberships in 1947, and that this problem had also arisen in 1943, suggests that honoraries made good use of their membership.<sup>70</sup>

The resignation of Lord Simonds as post-war chairman of the General Committee in 1951, when he became Lord Chancellor, ended a period of thirty years during which judges had been in the chair. His successor, Sir Alan Barlow, who had been involved in the governance of the club since the 1920s, was the most active among a remarkable group of senior civil servants whose presence, together with that of the judges and the bishops, did much to set the tone in the clubhouse during and after the war. If anyone could be described as the consummate Athenian it is Barlow, elected in 1915 and the son of Sir Thomas Barlow, physician to three monarchs, first baronet and a member of the club. Having taken a first in *Literae humaniores* or ‘Greats’ at Oxford, Alan Barlow entered the civil service, where he had a distinguished career as something of a reformer and retired as second secretary at the Treasury in 1948. Meanwhile his interest in the arts and science developed with that of his wife Nora, Darwin’s granddaughter and editor, and was later reflected in his chairmanship of the trustees of the National Gallery and presidency of the Oriental Ceramic Society. Precious pieces from Sir Alan’s Islamic pottery, a collection of national importance, are on permanent display in the clubhouse today.<sup>71</sup> The title of ‘consummate civil servant’, however, has been applied to another member who was actively engaged in the club’s committee work, particularly in the immediate post-war years: Sir Findlater Stewart, elected to the club in 1931, chairman of the national home defence executive in 1940, chief civil staff officer (designate) to the Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, and later charged with the logistics of the American forces stationed in Britain.<sup>72</sup> Sir Percy Grigg, described as ‘one of the quickest and ablest brains’ of his generation and elected in 1939, became chairman of the standing committee on army administration the following year, and, most unusually, was appointed Secretary of State for War by Churchill in February 1942.<sup>73</sup>

Several of the most senior officers from all three services became members during the war. General Sir Robert Haining was elected in 1940 and was a member of the Committee at the end of the war.<sup>74</sup> General Sir Archibald Wavell was elected under Rule II in January 1942, six months after the failure of his operation Battleaxe against Rommel.<sup>75</sup> Wavell’s literary work included his 1939 Lees Knowles Lectures at Cambridge, later published as *Generals and Generalship* (1941), a copy of which Rommel carried with him during the north African

campaign. After the election under Rule II of General Eisenhower in 1944, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe flouted convention by going upstairs to see his election card.<sup>76</sup> Three field marshals were elected under Rule II after the war: Earl Alexander of Tunis (1946); Viscount Montgomery of Alamein (1946), who failed to get his subscription reduced; and Sir William (later Viscount) Slim (1951).<sup>77</sup>

The club's association with the navy had been strong ever since it was founded by John Wilson Croker of the Admiralty. In 1918 Sir Alexander Gibb had been the civil engineer-in-chief at the Admiralty, where he developed the 'mystery towers' in the Channel, designed to counter the submarine threat but never used: he had chosen Major John Reith as his assistant.<sup>78</sup> Elected in 1927, Sir Alexander served on the General Committee during the Second World War and in 1950 covered the full cost of re-gilding the statue of Athene / Minerva.<sup>79</sup> Among other wartime habitués was Rear-Admiral Henry Thursfield, elected in 1919. Following his retirement in 1932 he served as editor of Thomas Brassey's *Naval Annual* (1936–63) and, like his father before him, as a naval correspondent of *The Times* (1936–52).<sup>80</sup> Admiral Thursfield proposed the beleaguered First Sea Lord, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound, for membership in October 1941. Elected under Rule II in January 1942, Pound was dying of cancer the following year when he was succeeded by Admiral of the Fleet Andrew Cunningham, himself elected under Rule II in January 1943.<sup>81</sup>

One of the academics attached to the Admiralty during the war was the Cambridge marine geophysicist Dr (later Sir) Edward Crisp Bullard, who had been a member since 1935. Having worked successfully with Patrick (later Lord) Blackett, his former research supervisor, on mine-sweeping and the demagnetising of ships, he joined Blackett's naval operational research group at the Admiralty ('Blackett's Circus') in 1941, working on strategies for conducting marine warfare and for attacking firing sites in northern France.<sup>82</sup> The close connection between aerial and sea-borne operations was exemplified in the work of Bullard and Blackett (who was elected in 1942), and of the mathematical physicist Dr (later Sir) Ralph Fowler, elected to the club in 1937 and soon afterwards serving on the Admiralty committee on the potential influence of air power on the navy.<sup>83</sup> It was in the development of Allied air power that the contribution of the 'back room boys' of the Athenæum proved to be most decisive.

In the mid-1930s a number of scientists and politicians had recognised that Britain's defences were inadequate and that the RAF would play a crucial role in any future war against Nazi Germany. Four of these men – all academics and all members of the club – recruited many of the younger scientists who developed radar and the atomic bomb. The most influential of the four, the physical chemist and scientific administrator Sir Henry Tizard, later wrote in a memorandum to Sir Alan Barlow at the Treasury that the majority of these scientists had worked in 'fields far removed from their pre-war activities'.<sup>84</sup> Scientific research and development in what Isaiah Berlin described as a 'don's war' was interdisciplinary and depended upon collaboration with engineers and military men.<sup>85</sup> Where better, then, to bring them together than at the Athenæum, always the natural home of FRSs, engineers and civil servants, and now also of senior officers?

The oldest of the four was the government scientist Harry Wimperis, whose work on the design and testing of aircraft during the First World War had entailed flying himself: he was born in 1876 and elected to the club in 1918. He was later surprised to become director of scientific research at the Air Ministry in 1925, when Tizard declined the post. The deputy director, David Pye, who had met Tizard at Cambridge, was to be elected to the club in 1934, when Wimperis served on the Executive Committee.<sup>86</sup> It was in that year that Wimperis recognised the need to fill an alarming vacuum in Britain's defences. Being responsible at the Air Ministry for assessing inventions of various kinds of 'death ray', Wimperis invited Archibald Hill, professor of physiology at University College London and another of our four pioneers, to discuss the matter over lunch at the Athenæum on 15 October 1934.<sup>87</sup> Following their meeting Wimperis prepared what proved to be a momentous note for Lord Londonderry, Secretary of State for Air and himself a member. He proposed that a committee of scientists be established to work on air defence, broadly defined. 'An excellent chairman', he wrote, 'might be found in Mr. Tizard, the present Chairman of Aeronautical Research Committee and a former R.F.C. pilot. The other members should, I suggest, be Professor A.V. Hill, F.R.S., and Professor Blackett, F.R.S., who was a Naval Officer before and during the War, and has since proved himself by his work at Cambridge as one of the best of the younger scientific leaders of the day.' In accepting this proposal, Londonderry

initiated the process whereby the 'boffins', as they came to be known, participated in the planning and execution of highly technical forms of warfare, alongside the 'top brass' of the Second World War.

Henry Tizard was a fellow of Oriel College Oxford before the First World War, during which he developed new flying techniques and methods of accurately measuring aircraft performance. He then returned to Oxford and was made a Reader in chemical thermodynamics. In 1919 he helped Frederick Lindemann, the last of our quartet, to secure an Oxford chair. Tizard's genius was not in original research but in identifying and supporting projects and scientists of great promise: he hated the term 'boffin' and the phrase 'back-room boy', as he believed that scientists should be in the front room.<sup>88</sup> In 1929 he became Rector of Imperial College London, to which he recruited some of the nation's future leaders in science and technology, while maintaining his own interest in defence. A year later he was elected to the Athenæum under Rule II. In January 1935, only three months after Wimperis's lunch with Hill, Tizard chaired the first meeting of his committee at the Air Ministry. Blackett and Hill added scientific weight and understood how the armed services operated; Wimperis and his former personal assistant, Albert Rowe (elected to the club in 1948), provided a channel of communication with the Air Ministry.<sup>89</sup> A month later Tizard, Wimperis and Sir Christopher Bullock, formerly permanent secretary at the Air Ministry and a non-member, lunched at the Athenæum, where they discussed a paper on 'Detection and location of aircraft by radio methods' by Robert Watson-Watt, the inventor of radar. Next day Wimperis suggested to Sir Hugh Dowding of the Air Council that £10,000 should be spent on investigating Watson-Watt's ideas, and the process to develop this secret technology was under way.<sup>90</sup>

In June 1935 Frederick Lindemann (later Lord Cherwell), Churchill's friend and advisor, was placed on the Tizard Committee at Churchill's insistence. During the First World War Lindemann had worked at Farnborough on the problem of 'spin' in aircraft, testing his theories empirically in the cockpit. Dubbed 'The Prof' by his tennis partner Lord Birkenhead in the post-war period, when he was Dr Lee's Professor of Experimental Philosophy (meaning physics) and a fellow of Wadham College, he lived at Christ Church from 1922 until the end of his life, visiting the great houses of England whenever

time allowed.<sup>91</sup> Like Tizard, Lindemann was an effective recruiter of talent, being responsible for bringing to Oxford Jewish refugee scientists from Hitler's Germany. Like Tizard, he recognised the need to strengthen Britain's air defences. But unlike Tizard, who was determined to concentrate on the development of radar, Lindemann insisted upon broadening the scope of the committee's advice, including support for R.V. Jones's research on infra-red technology.<sup>92</sup> The inevitable rows that ensued need not detain us here.<sup>93</sup> Matters came to a head in July 1936, when both Hill and Blackett decided to resign over Lindemann's threat to write a minority note on the committee. Hill set off for the Athenæum to write his letter to Lord Swinton, the Air Minister, whose committee employed the time-honoured device of dissolving Tizard's committee and then re-establishing it without the troublesome member, in this case Lindemann.

Tizard's biographer records that the decisions on new defence enterprises which led to the birth of radar were now taken 'between the Athenæum and Tizard's flat in St James's Court'.<sup>94</sup> Tizard proposed forty-three candidates and seconded forty-seven between 1935 and 1951. His record reflects his commitment not only to the club but also to the institutions that he led: having brought in colleagues from Imperial College he transferred his allegiance to Magdalen College Oxford on becoming president in 1942.<sup>95</sup> In the 1930s and 1940s, however, his support for seventeen of the leading scientists and administrators who worked in air defence or nuclear energy was more strategic. Between the establishment of his committee and the outbreak of war, Tizard seconded Robert Watson-Watt and proposed Ralph Fowler and Air Marshal Sir Philip Joubert de la Ferté, who was to have special responsibility for the practical application of radar in the RAF in 1939, by which time all three were members. During the war he seconded Herbert Gough, director of scientific research at the War Office; Stanley Livingstone Smith, superintendent of the Engineering Department at the National Physical Laboratory; and Patrick Blackett. He proposed John (later Sir John) Cockcroft, whose contributions to the development of radar and of nuclear power were to make him one of Britain's most famous Nobelists; Wing Commander William Helmore, inventor of the nose cone searchlight in fighters fitted with radar; and Air Chief Marshal Sir Wilfrid Freeman, who was responsible for aircraft production as well as research and

development. In his professional capacity Freeman recruited Arthur (later Lord) Tedder as his deputy in 1938 and Solly Zuckerman, a biologist who became an expert on the effects of bombing, as his chief scientific advisor in 1943. At the club, Wimperis proposed Tedder, who was duly elected under Rule II in 1944, and Tizard proposed Zuckerman, seconded by Blackett and elected in 1948.

So Tizard's famed ability to recruit innovative research scientists was displayed in both Whitehall and the Athenæum, where an unwritten code of confidentiality enabled him to hold discussions on highly sensitive matters. Free to focus on radar once more from the autumn of 1936, Tizard devoted most of his time to committees, conferences and receptions, and to meetings with 'those quiet effective men with whom one could, after dinner at the Athenæum, settle down in the library to discover just what could really be done about the latest worrying problem'.<sup>96</sup> Within eighteen months it was clear that the development of a chain of radar stations would require a large team of scientists to become involved in the event of war. Professor Cockcroft of the Cavendish Laboratory, Cambridge, later recorded that he was invited to lunch at the Athenæum by Tizard in the spring of 1938 to discuss 'new and secret devices we were building to help to shoot enemy planes out of the sky' and the possibility of the Cavendish supplying the scientists to 'nurse' them.<sup>97</sup> Cockcroft duly obliged by recruiting about eighty physicists. Several of the leading figures in the development of radar, apart from those already mentioned, were elected to membership of the Athenæum after the war: Sir John Turton Randall (1950) and Henry Boot (1966), inventors of the cavity magnetron; Albert Rowe (1948), Watson-Watt's successor as superintendent at Bawdsey Research Station; Robert Hanbury Brown (1986), the physicist and astronomer; Bernard (later Sir Bernard) Lovell (1963), whose subsequent work in radio astronomy was informed by his collaboration with Blackett during the war, and Edward Bowen (1962), head of the Airborne Radar Group at Bawdsey. Bowen and Cockcroft joined senior service personnel as members of the famous Tizard Mission to Canada and the USA from August to October 1940, the culmination of Tizard's efforts to persuade the government that the production of defence technology could be expedited by sharing Britain's most carefully guarded secrets with the Americans, whose own military efficiency would also be enhanced.<sup>98</sup>

## THE ATHENÆUM

The months leading up to the departure of the Tizard Commission witnessed Dunkirk, the surrender of France and the beginning of the Battle of Britain. In London anxiety in government circles that walls had ears became particularly acute. Hugh Dalton, newly commissioned by Churchill to ‘set Europe ablaze’ with anti-German partisan and terrorist activity in July 1940, told Lord Cherwell that he was ‘appalled at the amount of quack quack which goes on in West End Clubs and other public places over matters relating to the war’: ‘Some tell me, I say, that the Athenaeum is a little safer than some other Clubs, but I doubt even this. It is always observed, I say, who is with whom, and intelligent guesses are then made as to why they are together.’<sup>99</sup> Cherwell told Dalton, a non-member, that there was an old proverb that ‘At the Athenaeum you can’t hear yourself speak for the noise of the grinding of axes.’ Hardly surprisingly, Tizard and Lindemann, both powerful grinders of axes, held opposing views on the proper use of bomber command.<sup>100</sup> The ethical debate, however, on the question of retaliation was the province of the bishops, and particularly Bishop George Bell of Chichester, whose honoured place in the Anglican pantheon has only recently been contested. As well as speaking in the House of Lords and writing letters to *The Times*, Bell mobilised opinion through meetings with key individuals and often chose the club-house as a meeting place. Here is a characteristic letter, dated 4 March 1940 and addressed to the military advisor and historian Sir Basil Liddell Hart:

The Rev R.A. Edwards, vicar of Dartington, has just written suggesting that we should meet. I should particularly appreciate the opportunity. I am almost certain to be lunching at the Athenæum 1.30 on Wednesday, instead of the debate in the Lords that afternoon. Could we meet then? I hear you are a member of the Club. (I am not sure whether I can do any good by speaking on this particular occasion.) If you would like first hand knowledge about Sweden & Finland, I strongly recommend your seeing the Bishop of Lund (Dr. Rodhe) staying at the Grosvenor Hotel S.W.1. He has things to say. Ring him up, and say I advised you.

Yours sincerely George Cicestr:<sup>101</sup>

A rapport between the two men was soon established on the subject of the ‘bombing match’ between Germany and England, and a voluminous

further correspondence included references to leaving messages at the club-house and arrangements to meet there.<sup>102</sup> When William Temple died in 1944, Churchill passed over Bell and recommended Geoffrey Fisher as Archbishop of Canterbury.<sup>103</sup>

Meanwhile the possibility of developing an atomic bomb was opening up a new front in the technological battle, and again a number of current and future members of the Athenæum were in the vanguard. C.P. Snow's role as director of personnel at the Ministry of Labour from 1942 was to mobilise scientists for work on both radar and nuclear weapons. Having been elected to the club in 1946, he returned to his 'Strangers and Brothers' series of novels and the saga of Lewis Eliot's career as an academic and administrator. In the fifth novel of the series, *The New Men* (1954), Snow used Clubland as a significant point of reference in his depiction of Eliot's relationship with his younger brother Martin, a brilliant member of the team working on the 'uranium project' during the war. Fictional 'lunches at the Athenæum' in the novel mirror life. Like several of his fellow Athenians, including Sir Alan Barlow, Snow was also a member of the Savile Club in Mayfair, where he could enjoy a more relaxed atmosphere among the writers, journalists and artists who gathered in the bar. In *The New Men* Eliot walks through the 'deserted fringes of Mayfair' towards his own club, where he is questioned on the bomb.<sup>104</sup> At the end of the novel Snow uses the topography of Clubland in his depiction of Lewis's argument with his brother, as they emerge from Pratt's, where they have been drinking with Bevill, and walk up St James's Street: 'We looked across the road, where the lights of Boodle's shone on the moist pavement . . . We had gone past Brooks's before I said: "I can't help it" . . . As we walked past the club windows I could think of nothing else . . . We were standing still, facing each other, at the corner where the street ran into Piccadilly'.<sup>105</sup>

The potential of nuclear fission was discussed in defence circles in the spring and summer of 1939, and Tizard was naturally involved. Having first been approached by Professor Tyndall of Bristol University and then officially asked by the Committee of Imperial Defence to investigate the possibility of constructing a uranium bomb, Tizard once again drew upon his wide network of scientific contacts, the most significant of whom was the physicist Professor (later Sir) George Thomson, Tizard's colleague at Imperial College since 1930

## THE ATHENÆUM

and a member of the Athenæum since 1935.<sup>106</sup> When Rudolf Peierls and Otto Frisch showed their famous memorandum on the possibility of a nuclear weapon to the head of physics at Birmingham University, Professor (later Sir) Marcus Oliphant, in March 1940, Oliphant sent it on to Tizard.<sup>107</sup> All but one member of the MAUD (Military Application of Uranium Detonation) Committee who were charged with addressing the question were current or future members of the club: George Thomson, the chairman (elected 1935, awarded the Nobel prize 1937); John Cockcroft (February 1941, Nobel 1951); Patrick Blackett, the sole dissenter from the committee's report of July 1941 (1942, Nobel 1942); James Chadwick, who largely wrote it (1938, Nobel 1947); and Marcus Oliphant (1946). Philip Moon was not a member.

Chadwick, who had discovered neutrons in 1932 and was Rutherford's successor at the Cavendish, developed a cyclotron at Liverpool in 1939 and by the spring of 1941 had concluded that a nuclear bomb was not only possible, it was inevitable. As a result he began to lose sleep and resorted to sleeping pills for most of the rest of his life.<sup>108</sup> Later in 1941 he travelled to the United States with Oliphant and Peierls, and by 1943 the secret British project, masquerading as 'Tube Alloys', was collaborating fully with the huge Manhattan project. William (later Lord) Penney, who was to be elected to the club in 1951, joined the Manhattan Project in 1944 and visited Nagasaki and Hiroshima in 1945 to gather material such as bent poles and crushed cans from which he could measure the yield of the two weapons back in England, where C.P. Snow suggested that he should become chief superintendent of armament research.<sup>109</sup> Joseph (later Sir Joseph) Rotblat, one of Chadwick's most gifted protégés, also worked on the Manhattan Project, but later played a leading role in the international campaign against the nuclear arms race. He was elected to the club in 1964 and was joint winner of the Nobel prize for peace in 1995.

After the war, opposition to the development of nuclear weapons eventually led to the founding of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in 1958 and the (brief) imprisonment of Earl Russell in 1960 at the age of eighty-nine. (Having been excluded from the club in 1916, having been fined for impeding recruitment and discipline, Russell was re-elected under Rule II in 1952, by which time he had received the Order of Merit and the Nobel prize for literature.)<sup>110</sup>

More immediately, ethical questions were raised by Allied war crime trials. In a letter to Liddell Hart dated 8 June 1946, Bishop Bell recalled Philip Kerr, marquess of Lothian, a non-member, saying to him 'in the Athenæum one day, before he went to the U.S.A. [1939], when he had just had a private talk with Ribbentrop, that the British people would never make friends with Germany while the Germans behaved as they did with regard to the Jews and other victims of concentration camps'.<sup>111</sup> By 1946, however, Bell's focus had changed as he became the most prominent Anglican bishop among a group of anti-trial activists who used their West End clubhouses as ad hoc committee rooms where they could coordinate their campaign.<sup>112</sup> Among the group were other Athenians, including Liddell Hart, Montgomery Belgravia, author of *Epitaph on Nuremberg* (1947), Lord Pakenham, Lord Maugham and (from 1952) Lord Hankey, author of *Politics, Trials and Errors* (1950).<sup>113</sup>

Most leading members of the 'Moot' were also present or future Athenians. This group had met from time to time since 1938 to discuss moral and spiritual aspects of social and political reconstruction, and the role of elites in modern Britain from a Christian perspective. Its founder was Joseph Oldham, a missionary and campaigner who had considerable influence on William Temple and who, like George Bell, often sounded out writers, thinkers and broadcasters over lunch at the Athenæum.<sup>114</sup> At the Moot, Oldham brought together nineteen men and three women from different confessional and political backgrounds (not unlike Croker in 1824) to form what he thought of as a cell or order whose reflections would influence society via its influential members. Whereas the proceedings of such groups are often documented only sketchily, records of each meeting of the Moot, usually held over a weekend in a retreat house or conference centre, were made and circulated before the next: complete transcripts of nineteen of these gatherings are available in print.

Four Athenians who were recruited by Oldham in 1938 are representative in the range of their professional backgrounds. One of its leading lights and most regular attenders was Sir Walter Moberly, the first full-time chairman of the University Grants Committee, who had been seconded by Lord Macmillan for election to the Athenæum in 1935.<sup>115</sup> His friend William Temple put him on the committee that supervised the Pilgrim Trust report on long-term unemployment, *Men without Work* (1938), much of which was written by Walter

## THE ATHENÆUM

Oakeshott of Winchester College, who joined the Moot in 1938 and was elected to the club in 1941.<sup>116</sup> Christopher Dawson, elected in 1936, was a cultural historian of independent means and a convert to Roman Catholicism who became vice-president of the proto-ecumenical movement, ‘Sword of the spirit’. Finally, Gilbert Shaw’s independent work as an Anglican priest in Poplar, East London, and his campaigns on behalf of those most in need, were much admired by Oldham: Shaw had been elected to the club in 1919.

Fred (later Sir Fred) Clarke, director of the Institute of Education in London, was elected to the Athenæum in 1940, the year in which he became a central figure in the Moot and published *Education and Social Change*, where he developed Karl Mannheim’s idea of ‘planning for freedom’, a resonant phrase for the group. Mannheim, a Hungarian by birth, was appointed to a leadership in sociology at the London School of Economics after being dismissed from his professorial chair in Frankfurt by the Nazis. He joined the Moot in 1938, became a British citizen in 1940 (the year in which his *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction* was published in English), was proposed as a candidate at the Athenæum by William Temple in 1942 and elected two years later.

The *Times* obituary describes Mannheim as ‘more English than the English themselves’.<sup>117</sup> The same description was equally applicable to the Moot’s most famous member, T.S. Eliot, author of *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939) and *Four Quartets* (1936–42), who frequently attended meetings of the Moot from the beginning. Papers by members were circulated before meetings, and in January 1941 Eliot offered ‘Notes on Mannheim’s paper’. This concluded with commentary on why he found the Moot itself so profitable personally:

What is valuable is the formulation of differences within a certain field of identity – though the identity may be very difficult, if not impossible, wholly to formulate; what is valuable is association with people who may hold very different views from one’s own, but in general at the same stage of development and detachment – these are the people *worth* disagreeing with, so to speak. This I think we have in the Moot, and this we ought to keep.<sup>118</sup>

He would have found something similar at the Athenæum on his election under Rule II in 1949.<sup>119</sup>

During the meeting of the Moot in January 1941, Sir Walter Moberly commented on the need for 'practical political reconstruction and religious integration'.<sup>120</sup> 'Reconstruction' was not only a formalised branch of government in wartime. A broad movement of progressive thought that contributed to the Labour victory of 1945 originated in the thinking of policy-makers before 1939; and during the war the Labour team could 'applaud and encourage the work of Butler, Beveridge, Reith, Keynes and others'.<sup>121</sup> Keynes, elected to the club and raised to the peerage in 1942, wrote in that year: 'In 1918 most people's only idea was to get back to pre-1914. *No-one* today feels like that about 1939. This will make an enormous difference when we get down to it.'<sup>122</sup> Keynes helped William Temple, a trustee of the Athenæum, to write *Christianity and Social Order*, published in 1942, the year of Temple's translation to Canterbury: this has been described as 'one of the foundation piers of the welfare state and perhaps the most-read Keynesian tract of all'.<sup>123</sup> R.A. Butler, who was to be elected in 1954, wrote on becoming president of the Board of Education in 1941, 'The crisis of modern war is a crucial test of national values and way of life. Amid the suffering and the sacrifice the weaknesses of society are revealed and there begins a period of self-examination, self-criticism and movement for reform'.<sup>124</sup> His Education Act passed into law in 1944. Early in the war J.B. Priestley, a member since 1937, commented in one of his popular 'Postscripts' on the wireless that the 'New World' was the second topic after the war itself, and David Astor, elected in 1943, took an anti-Establishment stance that reflected a generalised longing for a 'New Jerusalem'.<sup>125</sup>

One of the most widely read *critics* of post-war 'progressivism', the political theorist Sir Ernest Barker, came from the opposite end of the social scale to Astor's, having made his way from humble beginnings to a classical education at Manchester Grammar School and Oxford, and never lost his broad Manchester accent. Elected to the club in 1922, when he was principal of King's College London, Barker wrote patriotic pamphlets for the Ministry of Education and the British Council during the war, and was knighted in 1944 for his efforts as chairman of the Books Council, which distributed books to allied countries whose libraries had suffered bomb damage. Oxford University Press then approached him to edit a volume that was designed to be 'a monument to the England of these days' and accordingly to be 'inspired by a general

sympathy for its achievement', but without 'self-laudation'.<sup>126</sup> In the preface to *The Character of England*, which was published in 1947, he thanked both Sir Alan Barlow, who helped in the planning of some of the chapters, and Clement Attlee, also a member of the club, who would have contributed had he not been called to other duties after the general election of 1945. Of the twenty-seven contributors, ten were current and two future members of the Athenæum, including G.M. Young on government, Lord Simonds on the law, James Sutherland on literature and Basil Willey on thought.

*The Character of England* celebrates Englishness as the nation faces an uncertain future. Lord Simonds explains the context of his chapter, written in the summer of 1945: 'In this hour, from the hearts of men all over the world, the cry goes up for law and order, for peace and security, for justice and liberty'.<sup>127</sup> Professor Sutherland echoes Arnold and quotes Shelley in his discussion of the future of literature in the context of 'a new social and political order': 'If the world's great age is indeed to begin anew, no one class can contribute more to a spiritual regeneration . . . than those "unacknowledged legislators of the world", the poets and the creative writers of all kinds'.<sup>128</sup> Professor Willey also draws upon nineteenth-century models, arguing that 'we need the Victorian seriousness more than ever, to counteract the present-day dissolution of moral standards'.<sup>129</sup> Most characteristically Athenian, however, is Barker's closing chapter entitled 'An attempt at perspective', where he argues that 'there is, after all, some inner affinity between the spirit of England and the spirit of Athens', and that Aristotle 'has been domiciled among us since the Middle Ages'.<sup>130</sup> Many of Barker's literary predecessors in the club, including Matthew Arnold, Sir Charles Waldstein and Sir Henry Newbolt, could have made one of his concluding remarks: 'It is impossible to think of the character of England without thinking also of the character of the gentleman'.<sup>131</sup>

Ten years before the publication of *The Character of England*, Captain Liddell Hart had received a printed card from the lawyer Sir Cecil Carr, honorary election secretary at the Athenæum, canvassing his views on a young candidate who was unable to meet members of the Committee as he was away in Spain. 'We all realise', Carr wrote in a covering letter, 'that candidates necessarily come up for election more quickly than they did'; on the other hand the Committee had 'not been afraid to elect young men if of the right sort': 'can

we say the candidate is a good fellow, likely to be clubbable, showing promise and ability in the profession he has chosen?<sup>132</sup> The Committee would scarcely reject him, as he was the son of a distinguished member, but they might suggest that he be withdrawn and re-entered when he was older. Liddell Hart replied that he had formed a 'very good impression' of Mr H.A.R. Philby, who was certainly on the young side for election but seemed to 'have a promise of making a good member of the Club'. Having passed the first test in the form of an exchange of views between gentlemen, and then having received support in the new Candidates Book from, among others, the librarian and scholar Sir Stephen Gaselee and the classical scholars Maurice Bowra and E.V. Rieu, Kim Philby was elected by the Committee on 19 April 1937 at only the second such election meeting after the abolition of the ballot.<sup>133</sup> He was twenty-five. His proposer was his father, St John Philby, a brilliant Arabist and explorer, who has been described as having an 'old-fashioned tory's addiction to *The Times*, the cricket score, the honours list, the Athenæum'.<sup>134</sup> Educated at Westminster and Trinity College, Cambridge, Kim Philby had impeccable credentials as an English gentleman in the making. Yet by 1947 the 'greatest spy in history' was copying large amounts of classified material to his Russian paymasters on a daily basis.<sup>135</sup> He was not of the right sort.

When recruited by the Russians in 1934, Philby was instructed to sever links with his communist past and adopt a far-right-wing stance. He joined the Anglo-German Fellowship, of which Jack Macnamara and Guy Burgess were also members,<sup>136</sup> and covered the Spanish Civil War for *The Times*. (He was decorated by Franco.) On his return to England he sent a note to Liddell Hart, thanking him for his 'very kind help and support' in his election to the club.<sup>137</sup> Membership served as a badge of probity and offered an entrée to the ranks of the English governing class from which a career in the Foreign Office and MI6 could unfold. Following Philby's escape to Moscow in 1963 and the publication of his apologia, *My Silent War*, in 1968, Hugh Trevor-Roper published a rebuttal entitled 'The Philby affair' in *Encounter*. Drawing upon his own experience as an intelligence officer, Trevor-Roper commented on the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) of the 1930s: 'Novels of clubland heroes may have given it a factitious lustre, but essentially it remained an amateur organisation with a slender budget, dependent often on voluntary assistance.'<sup>138</sup> Nevertheless,

Clubland played a significant role in the careers of the Cambridge spies, and it is surely no coincidence that while Philby achieved an early election to the Athenæum, Donald Maclean joined the Travellers next door and Guy Burgess the Reform Club next door but one, thus spreading their intelligence-gathering net, a miniature version of the chain of radar stations that was strung across southern and eastern England. Russia was Britain's ally, however, and it was not until the post-war years that Philby inflicted serious damage as a double agent, most notably in his leaking of the planned liberation of communist Albania in the early 1950s, a project that began life at White's in St James's Street and ended with the deaths of about three hundred infiltrators.<sup>139</sup>

Philby had a low opinion of Sir Percy Sillitoe, MI5's director-general in the post-war years, who was elected to membership of the Athenæum in 1950. As we will see in the next chapter, both Sir Maurice Oldfield, head of MI6, and Sir Alec Guinness, 'Smiley' to millions, were members in the 1970s.<sup>140</sup> In closing this chapter, however, let us briefly consider two members whose special treatment by the club reflected the high esteem in which they were held during and after the war. First the politician and secularist Lord Snell, whose father's name had never been registered on his birth certificate and who had become a bird scarer at the age of eight, like Thomas Hardy's Jude. He served as a Labour minister in the 1930s, was elevated to the Lords where the party was under-represented, served on the committee of Chatham House and was elected to the club in 1939. Two years later the Executive Committee, with Sir Alan Barlow in the chair, recorded 'Lord Snell's generous gift of sixteen volumes of L.C.C. Survey of London'.<sup>141</sup> Snell's fondness for the club was clearly reciprocated, as the following year, when the Executive Committee decided that no bedrooms should be let in the clubhouse on monthly tenancies, but only in the annexe, they made an exception in the case of Lord Snell, who was unmarried and in his seventy-seventh year.<sup>142</sup> In May 1944 his death was described as a 'great loss' in the General Committee's minutes: he had 'made his home in the Club for the past few years and was regarded with deep affection by all'.<sup>143</sup>

Second, after the war the significance of Sir Henry Tizard's new government responsibilities as chairman of both the Defence Research Policy Committee and the Advisory Council on Scientific Policy was recognised by the General Committee, who ordered building work to be carried out at the

## 'THE SECRET POWER OF ENGLAND'

annexe in order to provide him with a bedroom.<sup>144</sup> In December 1946, as the bells of Magdalen rang a peal of 5,000 changes to mark Tizard's departure from Oxford, the Athenæum became his second home.<sup>145</sup> At the clubhouse he could still conduct discussions with scientists in private, whereas at Storey's Gate he lacked the freedom that he had enjoyed as a government advisor in the early days of radar, and felt increasingly confined by civil servants. Bizarrely, his defence committee did not directly concern itself with nuclear weapons, which Attlee, now prime minister, kept under his own control.<sup>146</sup> While radar had contributed to victory in Europe and the atomic bomb had ended the war in the East, attention now turned to reconstruction at home.

## CULTURAL REVOLUTION

On 23 May 1974 a dinner was held to mark the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Athenæum.<sup>1</sup> HRH the Duke of Edinburgh, an honorary life member, proposed ‘The Club’, drawing heavily on the speeches made at the centenary dinner of 1924. In his reply, Lord Morris of Borth-y-Gest, an appeal judge and a trustee, reviewed the club’s early history, extolled its library and celebrated its luminaries past and present with a light touch. As is appropriate on such occasions, both speeches glorified the past and celebrated the present. Apart from a quip from the duke about ‘pop-idols’, neither speech referred to the rapidly changing contemporary scene which was to figure prominently in a new commemorative history of the club.

As Richard Cowell stated in *The Athenæum: Club and social life in London, 1824–1974* (1975), ‘inevitably the history of a Club, in common with all history, bears the stamp of the period in which it was written’.<sup>2</sup> Like earlier historians – Waugh in his slim volume of the 1890s and Ward in his centenary volume – Cowell was celebratory. Unlike Waugh and Ward, however, he was also nostalgic, as he regarded the mid-1970s as a low point in British social history and questioned whether the club would survive to celebrate its bicentenary.<sup>3</sup> In this chapter we consider the period from the mid-1950s to the mid-1980s. Although some aspects of the ‘cultural revolution’ that so disturbed Cowell at the time created divisions among the membership, others suited the club in the long term, allowing it not only to survive but also to position itself for the process of reinvention that was to take place in later decades (the subject of the final chapter).<sup>4</sup>

## CULTURAL REVOLUTION

During the 1960s and 1970s life at the club carried on much as before, in spite of recurrent financial difficulties. As Lord Morris said in his speech, the members continued to be ‘fairly reserved, rather modest and quite self-controlled’.<sup>5</sup> The decorous tradition of ‘lunch at the Athenæum’ had become proverbial in public discourse, as published novels, memoirs and diaries recorded conversations there in which bonds of friendship were strengthened, or matters of state and church quietly arranged in private. In Anthony Powell’s *Books Do Furnish a Room* (1971) the narrator returns to Oxford after the war and meets Leonard Short, once an undergraduate a year ahead of him and now a civil servant, in Sillery’s familiar rooms. ‘You must lunch with me one day at the Athenæum, Nicholas’, says Short on their departure.<sup>6</sup> Richard Crossman recorded a busy day at the Ministry of Housing in 1965 when, in spite of a hangover, he gave Charles Pannell lunch at the club in order to ‘sort out a whole number of minor items’, including why an appointment had been announced without his guest being consulted in advance.<sup>7</sup> Later that year Crossman gave Alan Bullock, a fellow member and Master of St Catherine’s College, Oxford, a ‘snappy lunch at the Athenæum’: ‘He had refused the job of chairman of the Parliamentary Boundary Commission. I wanted him to be the chairman of my new Commission on Local Government. Now after only an hour he said he was interested. That was a triumph. He is the one man in England in whom I would have complete confidence.’<sup>8</sup> The following year Crossman records, ‘I took the two Parliamentary Secretaries to lunch at the Athenæum, where we began to divide up our jobs. Bob Mellish will remain in charge of London housing and have all responsibility for New Towns.’<sup>9</sup>

The Right Revd John Bickersteth claims to have been the last bishop appointed by the ‘lunch at the Athenæum’ method, even though his meeting with Stuart Blanch in 1970 was actually held at another club, the Commonwealth.<sup>10</sup> The presence of bishops in the clubhouse had long been proverbial, as T.S. Eliot knew in 1948, the year before his election, when he wrote, ‘To ask whether the people have not a religion already, in which Derby Day and the dog track play their parts, is embarrassing; so is the suggestion that part of the religion of the higher ecclesiastic is gaiters and the Athenæum’.<sup>11</sup> ‘We have respect for our Bishops’, Lord Morris said in 1974.<sup>12</sup> An unbroken line of archbishops of Canterbury served as trustees between 1942 and 2000. Among the

diocesan bishops, the majority of whom were members, the most active was Henry Montgomery-Campbell, famed for his trenchant views and biting wit: on the appointment of Mervyn Stockwood, a fellow member, to the diocese of Southwark, he announced that he had taken steps to have the Thames widened.<sup>13</sup> Elected to the General Committee in 1953 when Bishop of Guildford, then to the Executive Committee in 1956 as Bishop of London and finally to the chairmanship of the General Committee in 1959, Montgomery-Campbell must have enlivened many meetings in the clubhouse. Geoffrey Fisher, described by Montgomery-Campbell as ‘a hard man – he boils his eggs in widows’ tears’,<sup>14</sup> proposed to the General Committee that certain archbishops and presiding bishops attending the Lambeth Conference in 1958 be offered temporary honorary membership during their stay. The Bishop of London happened to be in the chair that day, and the archbishop’s proposal was swiftly approved.<sup>15</sup>

Bishops at the Athenæum presented the *Express* newspaper group with opportunities for light relief.<sup>16</sup> In January 1957 the *Sunday Express* claimed that Fisher had ‘looked like a startled boy’ when the club let it be known that his criticism of government policy on Cyprus was not welcome there: it was regarded as ‘not quite good form’ and ‘at the Athenæum that is enough to quell any man’.<sup>17</sup> Bishop Montgomery-Campbell attended the meeting of the Executive Committee at which the article, headed ‘The Athenæum rebukes Dr. Fisher’, was discussed in the light of a letter from the archbishop himself.<sup>18</sup> Marmaduke Tudsbury, the pioneering civil engineer to the BBC, gave his views from the chair, and a letter to Fisher was drafted saying that ‘everybody in the Club’ knew the story to be untrue. This must have been regarded as consolation enough, as no further action was taken. Fisher’s visits to the clubhouse were rare, however.<sup>19</sup> Relations with the *Express* group seem to have improved since the publication of the embarrassing story about Ramsay Macdonald’s first visit to the clubhouse as a member in 1924.<sup>20</sup> The club gratefully accepted the originals of several *Express* cartoons by Sir Osbert Lancaster featuring senior clerics at the Athenæum, including ‘Have a care, Fontwater – we’re not in White?’ (1951) and ‘Pon my word, Barnstaple, it must have been worse than the Athenæum on boat race night’ (1962; Plate 32), in which two Anglican bishops read a *Daily Express* headline, ‘3000 Bishops in Rome’.<sup>21</sup> Today four of

## CULTURAL REVOLUTION

Lancaster's clerical cartoons are displayed in the lobby next to the lift and adjacent to the gents.

While enjoying affectionate teasing by cartoonists, the club tended to stand upon its dignity in the 1950s. Conducting business in the clubhouse, for example, was regarded as inappropriate behaviour by the guardians of a tradition of high-mindedness. Stiff notes were posted by the committee in 1955 requesting that the practice of some Athenians 'dictating letters to their Secretaries in the Front Hall or elsewhere in the Club' should cease, as many members had protested against it as 'unsuitable'.<sup>22</sup> Annoyance had also been caused by members meeting in the clubhouse, often with guests, 'in order to discuss business matters'.

Indeed, the dignity of the club was to be preserved at all costs. In 1951 the Executive Committee, which had and still has budgetary responsibilities, recommended that a cinema company be allowed to use the front entrance for a scene from a film, but only on condition that the club's name was not used.<sup>23</sup> It also stipulated that no inconvenience should be caused to members, which was the reason given for the General Committee's turning the proposal down. Two decades later the committee decided not to accede to a request from a French television company to film a sequence in the clubhouse on a Saturday in connection with a programme about science in Britain.<sup>24</sup> In 1981, however, the secretary, Captain Wyatt RN, was authorised to negotiate with Southern Film Ltd, who paid £750 to film a scene from *Winston Churchill: The wilderness years* in the clubhouse when it was closed on a Sunday, 'at no inconvenience to members'.<sup>25</sup> In the chair that day was the structural engineer Alfred Goldstein, who as chairman of the Executive Committee did much to strengthen the club's financial position.<sup>26</sup> Two years later, in January 1983, he reminded members of the General Committee that filming at weekends brought in income, but cautioned against advertisements being made, as the club's anonymity could not be guaranteed.<sup>27</sup> The Annual Report that year encouraged members who had 'any connection with the media industries' to bring this facility, 'for use if appropriate', to the notice of their professional contacts.<sup>28</sup>

A section on trading operations in the same report recorded that the experiment of introducing outside catering management, which came into effect in November 1981, had been successful financially and had led to an 'improvement

in the quality and standards of food offered to Members'.<sup>29</sup> The experiment had been partly in response to staffing problems: in June 1981 Captain Wyatt informed the General Committee that he had had to reprimand staff for making members feel unwelcome if they arrived for dinner after 8 p.m., half an hour before last orders could be placed, a sad reflection of the poor state of industrial relations in Britain at the time.<sup>30</sup> A more entrepreneurial approach to the management of the club was also reflected in the Committee's gratification that many members were taking advantage of the facilities offered for private functions and were reporting that a high standard was being achieved.<sup>31</sup>

These developments in the early 1980s followed decades of financial instability that had originated in the general decline of Clubland after the war, when money was short and the energies of candidates and many members of clubs were directed towards the rebuilding of civilian careers and domestic lives. At the 1948 AGM of the Athenæum, the chairman, Lord Simonds, said, 'some of our Members are rich and are willing to pay more for their meals, but most are not rich and have to be careful in their expenditure'.<sup>32</sup> Sir Findlater Stewart underlined the point at a subsequent meeting of the Executive Committee, when the club's financial situation was to be reviewed with the auditor present: this is 'a poor man's Club', he declared.<sup>33</sup> Subscriptions were kept low and the Athenæum survived, whereas several clubs closed or were amalgamated in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>34</sup> The possibility of amalgamation was seriously addressed by the Athenæum in 1952 when the chairman of the General Committee, Sir Alan Barlow, met his opposite number at the Travellers, next door, to discuss the idea. Could they keep their individual identities as clubs while making savings by sharing staff and kitchen facilities? The Committee decided that the disadvantages, such as high engineering costs, outweighed the advantages of the scheme, which was not pursued.<sup>35</sup>

The very idea of the Athenæum amalgamating with the neighbouring 'Foreign Office canteen' would have astounded members of both societies before the war. In the 1950s it reflected the gravity of the situation. Another significant indicator of financial embarrassment was the sudden increase in donations to the club by individual members. Colonel Mervyn O'Gorman's gift of £500 in July 1955, 'to be expended or invested in any way the Committee may direct for the good of the Club', was soon followed by Thomas Cannon

## CULTURAL REVOLUTION

Brookes's donation of £200 'from sale of a piece of land', and Richard Lewis's 'anonymous gift of shares to celebrate 30 years of his membership, worth £400'.<sup>36</sup> A handsome leather-bound Benefactors Book was promptly ordered, to be placed on a table in the drawing room.<sup>37</sup> Later gifts, some of them touchingly trivial, focused upon specific shortcomings in the clubhouse. In 1968, for example, Desmond Cannon Brookes tackled a perennial problem when he donated approximately £70 'for the purchase of coffee containers and thermos flagons for milk to replace the coffee urns at present in use in the Drawing Room and Morning Room'.<sup>38</sup> The pattern of donations recorded in the Benefactors Book provides a rough guide to the changing state of the club's finances: three gifts in the 1930s, five in the 1940s, twenty-two in the 1950s, sixty-seven in the 1960s, fifty in the 1970s, thirty-six in the 1980s, thirty-two in the 1990s and ten in the 2000s.

Price inflation and steep wage increases lay at the heart of the problem in the mid-1950s, when staff recruitment and retention became a matter of concern. In May 1956 the Executive Committee reported that by Whitsun a majority of the present waitresses would have left to take up the 'very lucrative employment offered them at seaside establishments during the summer months', and the AGM agreed to the General Committee's proposal that they increase the number of candidates to be elected that year, bringing the membership to 1,750.<sup>39</sup> (The ceiling was raised to 2,000 ordinary members in 1980.)<sup>40</sup> Bedroom charges increased and in 1959 subscriptions rose from 21 to 25 guineas.<sup>41</sup> (By 1985 they were £330.)

In 1953 *The Times* printed a paragraph reporting 'A letter from Broadmoor': 'From here (Block 6, where reside the "disturbed class", of whom a few are incorrigibly violent and a threat to all who approach them) there is a continuous gradation to the more stately and formal surroundings of Block 2, the atmosphere of which has been described by someone familiar with both as identical with that of the Athenaeum Club.'<sup>42</sup> Institutional standards of catering and bedroom provision in the clubhouse would have provided supporting evidence for the comparison. Major Frederic Newhouse, author of *Irrigation in Egypt and the Sudan*, complained at the 1962 AGM that the 'amenities of the Club had been reduced considerably in the last few years' and called upon the Committee to 'face facts and realise that to attain the same amenities as the

Club enjoyed in 1939 the subscription ought to be raised to 35 or 40 guineas'.<sup>43</sup> Two years later, when Malcolm Muggeridge speculated on which particular clubs C.P. Snow had in mind as centres of gossip in the 'Strangers and Brothers' series, he described the Athenæum as the place where 'seedy clerics and atrocious dons desperately wash down bad food with bad wine', a characteristically acerbic assessment which is inaccurate in respect of the wine.<sup>44</sup>

The clerics who frequented the clubhouse may or may not have been seedy, but their surroundings were certainly shabby. Sir David Wilson, formerly director of the British Museum, recalls that the furniture was 'in a mess' when he joined the club in 1969: 'the dining-room chairs routinely collapsed and were taken away to be repaired'.<sup>45</sup> Whenever redecoration became unavoidable in the post-war era the most economical solution was adopted. In 1954 the Committee accepted the art sub-committee's recommendation that Poynter's beautiful decorative scheme in the coffee room should be 'abolished' and that a 'simple ceiling and wall treatment be adopted', thus saving £1,000.<sup>46</sup> After long delays the work was completed in 1956 according to a scheme prepared by the architect Professor Sir Albert Richardson, president of the Royal Academy, who had been responsible for restoration work on several significant bomb-damaged buildings in London, including St James's, Piccadilly. Difficult though it is to believe, the opportunity was taken, 'with the cordial support of Sir Albert, to treat the ceiling with acoustic tiles, thereby saving expense, and reducing considerably the reverberance of the room'.<sup>47</sup>

When the ladies' annexe in Carlton Gardens was due to close in 1961,<sup>48</sup> and the basement of the clubhouse was remodelled to provide facilities for lady guests, the proposed modern decorative and furnishing scheme for the new space followed the precedent of 1936 in providing a contrast to the main public rooms of the clubhouse.<sup>49</sup> The furnishing sub-committee approved most of the proposals of a Mrs Spong for the scheme, which included bucket chairs in red corduroy by Sanderson, a 'Banquette' to be covered in material of a 'peacock colour', and a mural, 'to be placed at the West end of the bar-lounge, above the settee', which, it was believed, would be 'most attractive'.<sup>50</sup> (The sub-committee called for a sample of the banquette material and the Executive Committee hoped that a benefactor might be found to pay for the mural.) Changes were made to the lyre-backed dining chairs when the Art Committee

## CULTURAL REVOLUTION

pointed out that the lyre was ‘of one period and wrong in detail, while the rest of the chair was of another period’.<sup>51</sup>

Three years later, in 1965, another sub-committee was formed to tackle the thorny question of a decorative scheme for the drawing room. Marmaduke Tudsbery and his colleagues inspected ‘two samples of washable material resembling silk obtained by Mr. Darcy Braddell from Sandersons’ and called for a sample from Coles of Mortimer Street.<sup>52</sup> They also thought it best to consult a specialist before Ajax was used to clean the scagliola columns! In 1966 the hall decoration and repaving sub-committee recommended that the ‘Key’ pattern border to the floor should be repaired where necessary and the remainder repaved with ‘Roman Stone’ marble.<sup>53</sup> Although the repaving work was deferred while the financial implications were examined, approval was given for the redecoration of the hall and staircase, estimated at £4,000, and ‘electrical re-wiring and improvements’, costing £1,450, in August 1966.<sup>54</sup>

One member found these incompetent interventions too much to bear. John (later Sir John) Betjeman already had many friends and acquaintances in the club when he was elected in January 1948: fifty-seven members signed his page in the Supporters Book on the basis of ‘personal acquaintance’ and thirty-three of knowing his work.<sup>55</sup> Frequently combative on architectural matters – ‘We’ll do in that bloody fool Blomfield yet’, he once wrote to James Lees-Milne<sup>56</sup> – and the declared enemy of ‘ghastly good taste’, Betjeman made his views clear to his fellow members in 1954 when he introduced a Talk Dinner on the perils of modern architecture and helped to organise a celebratory dinner in the clubhouse for the Anglo-Catholic architect and church furnisher, Sir Ninian Comper.<sup>57</sup> In December 1966 he announced in a letter to the Revd Harry Jarvis, who was not a member, that he was ‘going to leave this place, they’ve done it up like a Trust House and though it is in its way a super-sophisticated joke to do such a thing, I find myself getting too simple for such jokes. I shall try and join the RAC instead.’<sup>58</sup> This he did.

Betjeman’s resignation letter of February 1967 is a model of the genre:

Dear Mr Secretary,

Your letter to me of last year following my protest about the ugly new lighting in the entrance hall and the trivial wallpapering of the Great Room

## THE ATHENÆUM

on the first floor put me in a dichotomy. You will remember that you said that the lighting couldn't be altered as it had just been put in and that my letter would be 'borne in mind'. Alas, that phrase – a Committee-like civil servant's – means nothing will be done and my letter is now in the waste-paper basket. I must tell you, and I hope you will tell the Committee, that I have had to weigh up in my mind my regard for the splendid club servants and my many friends among the members against the deep disquiet at the affront to Decimus Burton and T.E. Collcutt which the present lighting and decoration are. I fear I must resign. I am sending a copy of this letter to my friend Sir John Summerson. The Athenæum is indeed a club for intellectuals, but not for aesthetes like

Yours faithfully, John Betjeman.<sup>59</sup>

Betjeman could not make up his mind about the Athenæum, however, perhaps because he missed his friends. Twice he applied successfully for readmission, in 1970 and 1974, before finally disappearing from the list of members in the early 1980s.<sup>60</sup> He would not have liked another 'Trust House' style of intervention, when the hall floor was covered with PVC 'chessboard' tiling in 1969 (Plate 33).<sup>61</sup> Other members, however, who were as much aesthetes as they were intellectuals, still celebrated the appearance of the clubhouse in the 1960s and 1970s. When Sir Eric de Normann, chairman of the Ancient Monuments Board for England, spoke on the occasion of Claude Parry's retirement as secretary in 1962, he thanked him for helping to make the Athenæum 'a fulfilled beatitude': 'One never came into it without being struck by the dignity of it all, and the peace of mind it engendered.'<sup>62</sup> And when Lord Pearce, chairman of the Press Council and an exhibited landscape painter, retired as chairman of the General Committee in 1971, the artist John Ward RA testified that he had 'devoted much of his time to this Club which was a place of immense beauty; the atmosphere of the Drawing Room was one of peace and serenity, and it was an achievement to have retained the original architectural grandeur of this Club in these difficult times'.<sup>63</sup> Caring for the Schedule I listed building continued to be a struggle in the later 1970s, when the club explored various avenues for external funding and found its way blocked by the need to open the clubhouse to the public, as in National Trust properties.<sup>64</sup>