Caring for the library was also a struggle. As the journalist and art historian Iolo Williams pointed out in 1952, when he chaired the Library Committee, 'weedings out' had always been necessary in order to make space for new books.[65] Later in the 1950s it was calculated that about two hundred books were usually eliminated each year and about three hundred new acquisitions made.[66] The ladies' annexe contained about eight hundred volumes and, with the prospect of its closure, a sub-committee of the Library Committee, chaired by the historian Sir Charles Webster, reviewed the whole question and selected many more titles for disposal.[67] Runs of periodicals were sold or donated to other libraries and, with 'great regret' on the part of the Library Committee, a microfilm was substituted for the Club's run of *The Times*.[68] Between 1960 and 1962 about six thousand books were disposed of, including first editions of significant works by former members: over £7,000 was raised.[69] Order was brought out of chaos on the shelves, surprisingly late in the history of the library, after income from these sales provided the salary of a professional cataloguer for five years from 1964. The library staff gradually shelved books on any one subject 'together in one room': history in the south library, art in the north library, religion in the west library, and so on, as today.[70]

With funds in such short supply, however, the club was tempted to sell some of the books of 'historic, artistic, or bibliophilic interest' that Williams had vowed to retain. In 1953 the General Committee, with Sir Alan Barlow in the chair, sought the advice of the Executive Committee on the desirability of selling Gould's *Birds of Great Britain* in forty-eight volumes, valued at £2,000.[71] When the Library Committee were consulted they were unanimous in opposing the suggestion, and treasures that are still exhibited on special occasions in the clubhouse were saved. Williams set out the reasons for retention in a memorandum: first, selling such treasures was bad for the club's standing; second, valuable gifts of books would soon dry up; third, owning some rare and beautiful books represented one of the club's general amenities; and finally, the club had a very large number of ornithological members for whom the Goulds were of special interest. Similar arguments were put forward in 1959, when William Dawson & Son Ltd offered first £800 and then £1,500 for the club's set of Hakluyt Society publications, which were unarguably of great scholarly significance and were retained.[72] Five years later, the decision to

sell the club's copy of Goya's *Los Desastres de la guerra* (1863), valued by Sotheby's at £1,000, was rescinded when it was pointed out that the book had been presented to the club by the royal Academia de San Fernando, Madrid, in the year of its publication.[73] A first edition of Newton's *Principia* remained in the sale, however, and raised £1,500, £500 below the reserve. (Under the headline 'Unprincipled', the *Evening Standard* announced that the Athenæum, 'that famous ecclesiastical and academic redoubt', seemed to be 'in need of ready cash'.)[74] In 1970 the General Committee accepted the recommendation that the set of Royal Society Proceedings (1830–1965) should be sold: the proceeds were to be devoted to the binding of books.[75]

In November 1982 Alfred Goldstein reported to the General Committee that the cost of 'essential works' had led to negotiations between Captain Wyatt and both the Library Committee and the Art Panel 'on the basis that some contributions might be forthcoming from the Club's assets'.[76] Five months later, Goldstein informed the General Committee that the club's Meryon prints would be auctioned at Sotheby's on 16 June.[77] This valuable collection of etchings by Charles Meryon was part of a generous bequest to the club by the company director and Conservative MP Colonel Francis Lucas, who died in 1918. A specially designed 'swing-frame' had been made, allowing fifty-two prints in twenty-four frames to be viewed by members and their guests in the drawing room, and providing particular solace to Hector Bolitho early in the Second World War.[78] Having then been moved to a place of safety, this 'revolving case of etchings' was subsequently reinstated. Years later the mechanism of the stand broke down and the etchings were again withdrawn from exhibition. Fifteen of the etchings raised £11,840 and the remaining nine were re-auctioned.[79] A statement was prepared in case their ownership was spotted, but the membership was not informed of the sale.

The sale of Newton's *Principia* in the 1960s and of Meryon's etchings in the 1980s did nothing to improve either the club's standing or its self-esteem. The occasional defensiveness that can be detected in the General Committees from the 1950s to the 1980s can, however, be traced back to the post-war years, when not only were the finances of 'a poor man's Club' precarious, but some members were complaining that the Committee were not requiring a 'sufficiently high

standard for election under Rule III'.[80] In response, the election secretaries were asked to interpret the club's founding principles for a new generation. Sir Cecil Carr, an eminent lawyer, and Sir Alan Barlow, who retired from the Treasury that year, reminded the Committee in 1948 that a candidate should be expected to have 'some positive qualifications for membership', rather than simply having nothing against him, and argued that, 'generally speaking, if the Committee is doubtful, it should harden its heart'.

Sir Findlater Stewart, chairman of the Executive Committee, presented his own report in 1948 on the choice of 'new Committeemen'. 'For the General Committee', he wrote, 'we want to cover a wide and varied field of experience and connections for the purpose of elections under Rules II, III and IV. We also want to "dress the window".'[81] Sir Cecil Carr rephrased this last point the following year, when he argued for the choice of 'impressive names' to be on the Committee, 'exemplifying the eminence and learning of our membership', before coming to the need for 'names representing experience and knowledge of the various fields from which we draw our candidates'.[82] For the Executive Committee, however, it was 'common-sense, way-wise chaps' that were wanted, not necessarily 'super-eminent', but preferably regular attendants at the club.

The eminence of its more illustrious members had always been a source of pride in the club. When Clubland was at its zenith in the 1890s, the Athenæum had controlled the way in which it was presented to readers of the *Illustrated London News* by arranging for a member, the Revd Gledstanes Waugh, to write the article on the club in a series entitled 'In Clubland'.[83] Eminence was clearly the first criterion in choosing those members who were to figure in the accompanying drawing entitled *Ballot Day 1892* (see p. xviii): eighteen of the fifty-nine individuals portrayed there were Rule II members, fifty had titles of some kind, and of the other nine only three went to their graves as plain 'Mr'. Comparing these fifty-nine Victorian Athenians to the sixty-five members mentioned by name in the previous chapter, on the Second World War and its aftermath, we find that only five of the latter group remained 'Mr' (there were twenty-six knights, fifteen life peers, one hereditary peer, two honourables, three senior clergy, eight academic doctors, five professors and one colonel) and that eleven of them could be described as 'super-eminent': four were Nobel laureates,

seven were members of the Order of Merit and six were Companions of Honour (Lord Blackett received all three accolades).[84]

Forty of these sixty-five members had been educated at independent schools. The sixteen educated at grammar schools, many of them ancient foundations and/or future 'direct grant' grammar schools (1945–76), and the nine from other, mostly lowlier establishments, were simply the latest in a long line of members elected on the basis of ability rather than background, one of the club's founding principles.[85] When Harold Macmillan formed a new administration in 1957 he recorded in his diary that 'many considerations had to be borne in mind', not least 'U and non-U (to use the jargon that Nancy Mitford has popularised) that is, Eton, Winchester etc on the one hand; Board School and grammar school on the other'.[86] When choosing its own Committee men three years later, the Athenæum drew upon both U and non-U members, while also 'dressing the window' and representing the range of interests in the club, as Sir Findlater Stewart had recommended. The three *ex officio* members (as serving presidents of learned societies) were Sir Maurice Bowra PBA (educated at Cheltenham), Professor Sir Howard Florey PRS (St Peter's Collegiate, Adelaide) and Sir Charles Wheeler PRA (St Luke's Higher Grade School, Wolverhampton).[87] The elected chairman was the brilliant and shy physician and medical administrator Sir Russell (later Lord) Brain (Mill Hill). Among the elected members were Sir Ralph Richardson (Xaverian College, Brighton), Lord Pakenham, who retired from the Committee in 1962 as Lord Longford (Eton), Lord Denning (Andover Grammar School) and Lord Robbins (Southall County). The products of grammar schools who were elected by successive Committees during the 1960s and 1970s included Alan (later Lord) Bullock, George (later Lord) Porter, Denis (later Sir Denis) Rooke, Lord Kearton and Lord Beeching.

The upward social mobility associated with an expanded middle class (25 per cent of the population in 1911 and 43 per cent in 1971)[88] was the theme of two commentators whose key terms – 'meritocracy' and 'cultural revolution' – soon became common currency. Published a year after Macmillan declared that Britons had 'never had it so good', Michael Young's satirical essay of 1958 entitled *The Rise of the Meritocracy* offered a left-leaning critique of a society in which a minority of grammar school children was destined to

flourish at the expense of the majority through the 11-plus system.[89] (The fact that 'meritocracy', a positive counter in British politics today, was a pejorative term in Young's lexicon is often overlooked.)[90] Writing at the other end of the political spectrum, Peter Hitchens introduced his retrospective analysis of the 'cultural revolution' that had taken place between the *Lady Chatterley* trial of 1960 and the election of Tony Blair in 1997 with the observation that 'a series of important coincidences' had combined with 'the spirit of the age and the growth of a new type of middle class, mainly state educated and state employed, to bring about an entirely new culture'.[91]

Members of the Athenæum were particularly influential in two areas that shaped this new culture: education and science. The committee that produced the Robbins Report on higher education in 1963, for example, was chaired by a product of Southall County School and University College, London, who had been a member of the club since 1955: Lord Robbins CH became the first chancellor of Stirling University in 1968. Three of the founding vice-chancellors of the new 'plate-glass' universities were members of the club – John (later Lord) Fulton at Sussex (appointed in 1959), Lord James of Rusholme at York (1962) and Sir Charles Carter at Lancaster (1963) – and Jack (later Lord) Butterworth joined three years after his appointment at Warwick (1963). James and Butterworth were both educated at grammar schools. Randolph (later Lord) Quirk, who was educated at Cronk y Voddy School on the Isle of Man and University College, London, joined the club in 1962 and became vice-chancellor of the University of London in 1981. He enjoyed other clubs, but the Athenæum was '*the* club, remaining comfortingly academic': he also found it 'handy to have informal contact with virtually all the UK's other vice-chancellors'.[92]

On 1 October 1963, three weeks before the Conservative government accepted the conclusions of the Robbins Report, Harold Wilson addressed the Labour Party Conference at Scarborough on the subject of 'Labour and the scientific revolution', arguing that a 'new Britain' would need to be forged in the 'white heat' of this revolution.[93] Having warned against the danger of applying the 'old-boy network approach to life' internationally and relying upon 'special relationships' with those who can 'bail us out', Wilson emphasised the importance of the universities, including a proposed 'university of the air', for the

delivery of a new, self-supporting technological Britain. A specialist in technical education, Sir Peter Venables, who was to chair the planning committee of the Open University and serve as its first pro-chancellor, was elected to the club in 1963. The following year Wilson himself joined under Rule IV, two months after becoming prime minister.[94] Whereas Earl Attlee was proud of his close connections with Haileybury and the Athenæum, Wilson preferred not to mention his membership of the club, his house in Hampstead, his children's private education and his predilection for cigars. 'Attlee was a member – a humble member if you like – of the Establishment', wrote one journalist at the time, whereas Harold Wilson, the first product of a grammar school to get to the top, 'is not'.[95] The leading scientists among Wilson's fellow members included Sir John Cockcroft (Todmorden Secondary School), Sir James Chadwick (Manchester Secondary School), Sir William Penney (Sheerness Technical School), Sir John Kendrew (Dragon School, Oxford), Sir Lawrence Bragg (St Peter's College, Adelaide), Ted Allibone (Central School, Sheffield) and Patrick Blackett (Royal Naval College). Blackett, a 'key influence' upon Wilson in the 1950s,[96] and Penney were both to accept peerages from the Labour premier a few years later.

C.P. Snow described the world inhabited by several of these scientists in his novel *The New Men* (1954), where the longing of those outside the top-secret uranium project to be 'in the know' is illustrated in an episode set at the Athenæum: 'a bald bland head' whispers '*March 22nd*' to the narrator from the adjacent stall of the lavatory and raises a finger to his lips.[97] Five years later Snow, long a member of the club famed for the interaction of the sciences and the arts, delivered the controversial lecture in Cambridge that was subsequently published as *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*, in which he lamented the scientific illiteracy of a generation which still privileged Classics and the humanities in its education system and cultural hierarchy. Following a spirited response from F.R. Leavis, Snow reconsidered his position in a book published in 1963, where he wrote more optimistically about the potential of a mediating third culture.

The 'two cultures' debate was characteristic of a decade defined by a series of polarities and divisions, ranging from the Cold War to the tension between a new 'youth culture' in Britain and an older generation scarred by the Second

World War. Richard Crossman wrote of the 1960s: 'How separate we keep ourselves in Britain. There is the legal world, the doctors' world, the artistic world, the dramatic world, the political world. We are tremendously separate.'[98] In this period of rapid sociological change, it has been argued, professionalism 'contrived to restructure society on a different principle from class as traditionally understood, in a new vertical structure of rival career hierarchies, a fragmented society of competing elites in which a single dominant elite or ruling class was hard to find'.[99] Here is a clue to the survival and later reinvention of the Athenæum, which could claim to be an informally constructed elite that was tied to no single profession or indeed either of the two 'warring factions' of professions (public and private sectors), and that fostered social and intellectual exchange between them. The Athenæum had always provided a meeting place for professionals from all of Crossman's 'worlds', and continued to do so in the 1960s and 1970s, when the club was said to be 'populated with the meritocracy or, as the secretary [Allan Peebles] puts it, "people who have established themselves in whatever professions they have pursued" '.[100]

In order to maintain its status as a loosely knit elite based upon ability rather than class, the Committee had to maintain high standards in its choice of candidates for election. And here the definition of a 'gentleman', always fundamental and yet frequently contested in British society, came into sharp focus. The selection policy of the General Committee in the 1970s was unacceptable to Monsignor Alfred Gilbey, a colourful old-school habitué since 1927. Having been virtually a resident in the years preceding his permanent move to the Travellers Club in 1970, he subsequently resigned from the Athenæum with great reluctance, after fifty years of membership, when one of his candidates was turned down 'because he had not yet reached a sufficiently high grade in the civil service'.[101] According to the architectural historian David Watkin, himself a member at the time, Gilbey was 'appalled at the consequent implication that the club had ceased to be a gentleman's club but was now some sort of professional association'. Although the Athenæum had always been populated with professional gentlemen, for Gilbey it was the latter term that counted. Lord Quirk knew the club for over a decade before he joined in 1962, and was aware that, in 'hobnobbing with such eminent folk as Henry Tizard, David Pye, R.V. Jones, Leslie Farrer-Brown, Ifor Evans, Solly

Zuckerman, John Wolfenden and C.K. Ogden', he was privy to 'weighty and confidential power-broking matters'. He also recognised that it was 'an institution of enormous importance for careers, not only in academia but the other major professions'.

In the 1970s, however, when other clubs were closing due to inflation, Monsignor Gilbey used to say that the Athenæum would always survive as 'the canteen of the establishment'; and Lord Morris joked in his speech of 1974 about the possibility of changing the name of the Athenæum (briefly 'The Society' in 1824) to 'The Establishment'.[102] Anthony Sampson, writing in 1962, regarded the idea of 'the Establishment' as a post-war myth based upon the pre-war reality of circles such as the Cliveden set and its influential arguments for appeasing Hitler.[103] The Athenæum was not the natural home of the 'Establishment' that enjoyed country house weekends, but of a professionalised 'establishment' that had been shaped by two world wars, an irreversible shift of power away from the landed aristocracy and the expansion of the middle class. In 1939 the Athenæum was listed far below the Turf Club or the Marlborough, 'so far as social importance goes'.[104] A few years later it was described as 'at once the most exclusive club in England and the most inclusive' in terms of eminence, largely professional eminence: 'Nothing quite like it ever happened before; even in London men stand in awe of it.'[105]

In his 1975 history of the club, Richard Cowell, educated at Roan Grammar School and King's College, London and a member since 1944, devoted much space to its most eminent members and its civilised traditions. In a chapter entitled 'Spirit of place', however, he also recorded his shocked response to the undermining of traditional values in society at large, a trend that was often associated with the 'cultural revolution'. Having retired from the Foreign Office in 1946, Cowell wrote a number of successful books on Cicero and everyday life in ancient Rome, and studies on modern 'cultural values' and the work of the sociologist Pitirim Alexandrovich Sorokin, whom he greatly admired. All these interests are reflected in *The Athenæum: Club and social life in London, 1824–1974*, which was published with the club's imprimatur.[106] Here Cowell's celebration of the club's Ciceronian urbanity follows in a classical tradition extending from Matthew Arnold to Ernest Barker.[107] His lament over modern Britain was written amidst the general gloom surrounding the miners' strike

and 'three-day week' of 1974, a year of continued IRA bombing in London and of student unrest.[108] Cowell believed that the club's values could arise 'only in a society in which cultural life is honoured':

> Elsewhere the author has written about the nature of 'culture' as being all that which, transmitted orally by tradition and objectively through writing and other means of expression, enhances the quality of life with meaning and value. It is this inheritance that alone makes possible a development of the human mind towards, first of all, the mere discovery or formulation; next the realisation, appreciation and possession; and finally the personal achievement by constant practice and striving after qualities summarised by those traditional abstract nouns, 'truth', 'beauty' and 'moral worth'. By such means alone is it possible to ensure the perpetuation and the progress of the sciences, of the arts and of worthy behaviour. All who seek relief from the humdrum round of everyday, workaday existence, not to mention the dismal downward vortex of mere sensuality, sexuality and animality, can find it by activities that qualify as 'cultural' in the sense here defined.[109]

If the cultural revolution heralded the end of culture as Cowell understood the term,[110] what role remained for the club? Indeed, did it have a future? At the end of his history Cowell acknowledged that the pessimists did not 'lack reasons for fearing there there may be no celebration of the first two hundred years of the Athenæum in A.D. 2024'.[111] The one reply available to optimists, he believed, was Nelson's motto, 'Engage the enemy more closely'. Perhaps the struggle against poverty, ignorance, envy, greed, hatred and violence which the best spirits can mount 'in the environment of the Welfare State' will so raise all standards that the values of the Athenæum and other clubs will once again be appreciated, 'because the need for them will be seen to be ever greater'. This seemed a faint hope, however, in the context of Cowell's negative views on a rapidly changing society outside the clubhouse.

Traditionalists were particularly concerned about the new 'youth culture' of the 1960s and 1970s. When commenting on student unrest, Cowell cited his fellow club historian Sir Almeric FitzRoy, who had tried to locate and describe the aura of the Travellers Club in the 1920s.[112] 'Recent events in the student

world', Cowell wrote, 'have demonstrated that some new universities and colleges have by no means yet succeeded in realising "urbanity, the flower and flavour of intercourse", neither could they be credited with "imparting a delicate note to the social graces of courtesy, accessibility, and tact".'[113] The contrast between the dignified classicism of these clubmen and the undignified behaviour of the young rebels of 1974, caught up in what Cowell describes as the 'dismal downward vortex of mere sensuality, sexuality and animality', could hardly be starker. The 'permissive society' had come to prominence a decade earlier, with the *Lady Chatterley* trial (1960), the arrival of the Pill (1961) and of Mary Quant's miniskirts (1963), the year of the Robbins Report and of Wilson's 'white heat' of technology speech. And it was the strivers of the state-educated middle class who registered the greatest shock, not least because of revelations concerning the upper echelons of society.

The 'year of sensations', 1963, witnessed the resignation of the Harrovian Secretary of State for War John Profumo, and the trial of the society osteopath Dr Stephen Ward, eliciting from Malcolm Muggeridge the observation in the *Sunday Mirror* that 'last week the Upper Classes passed unquietly away'.[114] In retrospect the real scandal was not the minister's affairs or even his lying to the Commons, but the framing of Ward, a process in which certain members of the Athenæum were involved, directly or indirectly. In the second week of June, some days after Ward's arrest, there was a meeting at the clubhouse, described here by Phillip Knightley and Caroline Kennedy:

> Those present were mostly patients of Ward and some of them had known him socially as well. All of them held important positions in public life. All of them had been asked by Ward's solicitors if they would be prepared to appear at the Old Bailey to give character evidence for their client. Each wanted to know what the others had decided.
>
> We have spoken with a man who was present at this meeting, a former high-ranking Foreign Office official. He does not want to be identified because, to this day, he remains ashamed of what happened and his part in it. 'We discussed the problem. On the one hand we liked and respected Ward and we wanted to help him. On the other, if we were seen to be involved in such a sordid case in no matter what role, then we would be

ruined. We decided that if Bill Astor, Ward's oldest friend and patient, was not going to give evidence on Ward's behalf, then we could also decline.

'Of course, we risked being subpoenaed, but we felt that, on balance, Ward's counsel would not risk this course of action in case, in order to save our own skins, we turned hostile. We've all had to live with our decision. For my part I can't tell you of the moral awfulness of abandoning a friend when he most needs you, and a friend, moreover, who was completely innocent of the charges against him.'[115]

As no numbers or club affiliations are provided here, we can only be certain that at least one of these unnamed but shamed figures – the individual who hosted the meeting – was a member of the Athenæum.

Two senior Athenian lawyers with official roles relating to the Profumo Affair were motivated, not by a desire for self-preservation, but by a determination to limit what Anthony Wedgwood Benn described as 'the decay of the old British Establishment' in June 1963.[116] Sitting with two other appeal judges, Lord Chief Justice Parker of Waddington, a member since 1954 and fond of his old school, Rugby, set aside the recent conviction of 'Lucky' Gordon and concealed Christine Keeler's extensive perjury at his trial, thus undermining Ward's defence at his.[117] (Once Ward was convicted, Keeler was tried for perjury and sentenced to nine months' imprisonment.) Lord Denning, educated at Andover Grammar School and a member since 1944, produced a report in September 1963 which sold over 100,000 copies in a few days.[118]

Equally sensational in 1963 was the revelation that Kim Philby's 'old-boy network approach to life', to coin Harold Wilson's phrase, had served him well in betraying his country.[119] On 1 July it fell to the Lord Privy Seal, educated at Chatham House Grammar School, Ramsgate, and soon to be nicknamed 'Grocer Heath', to announce in the House of Commons that the Wykehamist Philby was the Third Man in the Cambridge spy ring.[120] When Sir Alec Guinness was about to play Smiley in the BBC adaptation of *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* (1979) he wanted to 'savour the company of a real old spy', according to John le Carré (David Cornwell).[121] So Cornwell invited Guinness to lunch with Sir Maurice Oldfield, who was head of the SIS, commonly known as 'MI6', until 1978. Oldfield, educated at Lady Manners School, Bakewell (now a

comprehensive) and Manchester University, had not met Guinness, who was educated at Roborough School, Eastbourne (a minor independent school), even though both were members of the Athenæum, where occasional complaints were made about the presence of heavily built protection officers when Oldfield was in the clubhouse.[122] In his account of the lunch, Cornwell, educated at Sherborne and Oxford, refers to Oldfield's 'homey north-country voice' and records part of the conversation: ' "You should join the Athenæum, David," Oldfield says kindly, implying that the Athenæum will somehow make a better person of me. "I'll sponsor you myself. There. You'd like that, wouldn't you?" ' (Cornwell did not take up the offer, but joined the club for a few years in the late 1990s at the suggestion of his agent, Bruce Hunter.)[123]

In 1973 Oldfield was said to spend much of his spare time 'at his old haunt, the Athenæum, where he's often to be seen at table, a small, paunchy, convivial figure. He talks quietly, listens intently and has a wry, donnish sense of humour and a gift for merging into the background; one person who met him was reminded of George Smiley.'[124] Oldfield's humble background was unusual for a head of SIS,[125] but not for a member of the club, where origins are less relevant than ability and clubbability, and where the most affirmative term applied to an individual is 'interesting'. Like several other civil servants, Oldfield contributed to the governance of the club, serving as a member of the Executive Committee and briefly as a membership secretary in the 1970s, while he was in office. A table published in 1969 indicates that the Athenæum, with eight senior civil servants, came second only to the Reform Club which had fifteen.[126] R.A. Butler recalled his first act as Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1954, the year of his election to the club:

> I started my Treasury life by responding to an invitation to meet Edward Bridges and William Armstrong at the Athenæum Club. The first was head of the Treasury and, in those days, of the Civil Service; the second, destined to head the Civil Service himself in later years, was to be my Private Secretary. We sat at a table in the window and ate what remained of the Club food after the bishops had had their run; for we were somewhat late, and the bishops attack the sideboards early.[127]

Butler was 'comforted' by the personalities with whom he was to work. Bridges had been elected to the club in 1946 and Armstrong was to join in 1970.[128]

In 1963 Frank Lawton, Assistant Solicitor to the Ministry of Labour, provided the Executive Committee with the latest 'classification by occupation of the members of the Athenæum', together with 1955 figures for comparison. Of the 1,971 ordinary members, 121 came from the Home Civil Service, about the same number as before, and 90 from the Colonial Civil Service, a decrease.[129] There were only 11 farmers and landowners, another decrease. Several categories remained about the same, including the 149 FRSs and 144 from banking, industry and commerce. Others showed an increase: there were now 65 engineers, 82 other scientists, 147 lawyers, 21 from the BBC and national corporations, 60 from learned and other societies and 187 practising members of the medical profession. Twenty years earlier the Executive Committee had been concerned about the 'apparent preponderance of candidates belonging to the medical profession' among the new members, an observation which was repeated in 1947.[130] Now they were reviewing the proportion of medical members on an annual basis – 13.8 per cent in 1963, 14.0 per cent in 1964 – in order to avoid an imbalance in the membership.[131]

The number of painters and architects (69) in Lawton's figures for 1963 remained about the same as in 1955. The election under Rule II of some of Britain's leading artists over the next couple of decades came when they were in their sixties or seventies, and had already been garlanded with other honours. Sir Jacob Epstein was elected in 1955, the year after receiving his knighthood; Henry Moore in 1963 (CH 1955, OM 1963); John Piper in 1974 (CH 1972); and Graham Sutherland (OM 1960) in 1974. Charles (later Sir Charles) Wheeler was elected in 1957 as the president of the Royal Academy. Sidney Nolan, the Australian painter, was elected under Rule II in 1978 at the age of sixty, having been proposed by the historian the Hon. Sir Steven Runciman and seconded by Henry Moore.[132] Nolan's close friend and collaborator Patrick White, the Australian writer, was infuriated by his remarriage in January 1978, following the suicide of his first wife in London. In 1981, the year of Nolan's knighthood, White lashed out at 'the chase after recognition by one who did not need it, the cameras, the public birthdays, the political hanky-panky . . . all

of which, and the Athenæum Club, would contribute to the death of any painter'.[133]

Music was again strongly represented in this period, with elections including those of Sir Arthur Bliss in 1960 (CH 1971), Yehudi Menuhin in 1968/69 (OM 1987), Sir William Walton in 1973 (OM 1967), Sir Benjamin Britten in 1974 (OM 1965, CH 1972) and Sir Frederick Ashton in 1980 (CH 1970, OM 1977). Athenian knights of stage and screen included Sir Noël Coward, elected in 1937, Sir Ralph Richardson (1950) and Sir Terence Rattigan (1962). Among those involved in broadcasting were groundbreaking writers and presenters such as Alistair Cooke ('Letter from America', BBC Home Service and Radio 4, 1946–2004), Kenneth Clark (*Civilisation*, BBC 2, 1969), Jacob Bronowski (*The Ascent of Man,* BBC 2, 1973) and Robin Day (*Question Time*, BBC 1, 1979–89). Sir Robert Fraser, elected in 1967, was the first director-general of ITA under its first chairman, 'K' Clark, who recalled being 'very quietly, but unmistakeably booed' at the Athenæum, when the Television Act was passed in 1954.[134] 'There was a good reason for this demonstration', Clark commented: 'On a given evening fifty thousand people can read fifty thousand different books. But they can look at only one or two television programmes.' Habitués of the finest club library in the world were not yet ready to embrace the expansion of television.

The number of members categorised under 'literature and history' in 1963 (47) had decreased since 1955. Among the creative writers were T.S. Eliot (1949), John Betjeman (1948) and C.S. Lewis (1957);[135] Angus Wilson was elected in 1966 and Gore Vidal in 1983. But there was a marked rise in the number of academic literary critics and biographers, probably categorised by Lawton under universities, schools and museums (350, a large increase). The club had always been the natural home for the literary Oxbridge don and the gentlemen scholar: among the surviving Georgian literati, for example, were 'Dadie' Rylands of King's College, Cambridge (1932) and Lord David Cecil of New College, Oxford (1947, 1975).[136] Now began the march of the professors, including Norman Jeffares of Leeds University (1960) and Brian Morris of Lampeter (1977). American biographers whose work on eminent literary Athenians often brought them to Britain included Gordon Ray (1960), the Thackeray specialist, who was sponsored by Professors James Sutherland and Ifor (later Lord) Evans;

Leon Edel (1965), the leading expert on Henry James; and Richard Ellmann (1980), biographer of Yeats (as well as of Wilde and Joyce). Sutherland and Evans also sponsored Lionel Trilling (1958), whose work on the liberal imagination addressed a familiar Athenian theme and aspects of the 'two cultures' debate of the early 1960s. Other American literary scholars included Cleanth Brooks (1965), author of *The Well-wrought Urn*, who also served as a cultural attaché at the American Embassy, and Donald John Green (1979). Some professors, such as Joseph W. Reed (1962) and René Wellek (1971), were offered temporary honorary membership while they worked in London.

In 1975 the 'well-tried practice' of offering such temporary memberships was presented as a reason for turning down a proposal from the Cosmos Club in Washington to establish reciprocal arrangements for members.[137] A year later, however, informal approaches were made to both the Cosmos and the Athenæum's sister club in New York, the Century.[138] In 1981, following successful negotiations with both clubs, the General Committee 'endorsed in principle the desirability of increasing the number of suitable Clubs overseas, with which reciprocal arrangements might be negotiated'.[139] A rather warmer atmosphere could also be discerned domestically, in comparison with the notorious coolness and formality of earlier generations. In October 1969 a sub-committee had been formed to consider the suggestion from Sir Alan Burns, chairman of the General Committee, that a cocktail party or musical evening might be held the following summer, when members could invite lady guests.[140] By 1976 what came to be known as the Summer Party had become a popular fixture in the club's calendar, and Talk Dinners continued to be well attended.[141] Three years later the General Committee overturned the Library Committee's decision not to subscribe to *Private Eye*, and, in a rather laboured minute, spelled out the merits of promoting 'friendly relations among Members' by encouraging those who used the 'communal tables' in the coffee room to 'sit next or opposite to places already occupied'.[142] This last point was taken up at the AGM, and by 1986, when John Nevinson, a retired civil servant, donated a dedicated long table for the purpose, 'Club Table' had become one of the most cherished aspects of life at the Athenæum (Plate 34).[143]

The convention that members should join those already seated at Club Table brought individuals into immediate contact with others from a variety of

professional backgrounds and widened social contacts within the club.[144] All clubs have coteries, however, and the Athenæum's most famous post-war coterie was named after another piece of furniture in the clubhouse. 'The Sofa', formed by retired civil servants, together with 'the odd technical authority', would commandeer a particular sofa in the drawing room after lunch, which was usually taken in the light luncheon room (now the picture room).[145] Active from the 1950s to the 1970s, this group of habitués defended its territory fiercely, forming an inner citadel within the clubhouse. Instigated by Sir Eric de Normann of the Office of Works, the Sofa's regulars were Sir Alan Burns, Marmaduke Tudsbery and the former governor of Sind, Sir Hugh Dow, who lived in the same block of flats in Pall Mall as Sir Alan. All four were born between 1886 and 1893, and none was educated at Oxford or Cambridge. John Udal adds two other names of the same vintage: General Sir William Platt, formerly Commander-in-Chief, East Africa, and Bishop Montgomery-Campbell.[146] John Charlton, an archaeologist and inspector of ancient monuments and historic buildings, was a younger member and the group's later chronicler. The Sofa became such a familiar feature of club life that De Normann's role as its founder was mentioned in his *Times* obituary.[147]

Another coterie began life as a pressure group. The context was a dispute about lady guests that came to a head at the 1974 AGM and to which Lord Morris referred obliquely in his 150th anniversary speech.[148] Two months earlier Sir Percy Faulkner, retired civil servant and chairman, informed the General Committee that a meeting had been held with Dr (later Professor Sir) Roger Scruton and representatives of 'a group of Members opposed to Lady Guests being allowed the use of the Drawing Room after dinner'.[149] This group, who were known as 'The Misogynists', but later wisely changed their name to 'The Traditionalists', was opposed to the experimental scheme and had suggested instead that members and lady guests should only be allowed into the morning room after dinner. The committee members present at the meeting had disagreed, but a compromise solution was sent forward to the AGM, namely that the experimental period be extended for one further year and that 'the south end of the Drawing Room be reserved for the use of Members only'.[150] A 'full and lengthy discussion' ensued, during which Guthrie Moir, the former controller of education and religious programmes at Thames

Television, argued that the proposal to cordon off part of the drawing room and then use the morning room to entertain ladies was 'contemptuous and illiberal'. He was supported by the Harley Street physician, Sir Edward Muir, and 'other members'. Dr John Casey, however, said that he was a comparatively new member who had joined the Athenæum for its 'unique masculine atmosphere' and felt that the introduction of ladies was out of place in the drawing room, a position supported by Dr David Watkin and 'a small number of members'. Once the offending final clause had been removed, the resolution was passed by a clear majority.

Dr Casey had only been elected in 1973 and Dr Scruton in 1972, the year after his appointment to a lectureship in philosophy at Birkbeck College, London, at the age of twenty-seven. Like Dr Watkin, who was to resign in the 1980s,[151] Scruton was a friend and admirer of Monsignor Gilbey, whom he had known as the Roman Catholic chaplain to Cambridge University.[152] Whereas Gilbey could be criticised for being out of touch, like others of his generation who took a conservative stance on such issues, Scruton, a very young leader of the opposition, was in a position to argue that this was not the club that he had recently joined. As in several other areas explored in this chapter, the argument over lady guests reflected wider social changes and clashes between new and old manners, between innovation and traditionalism. Arguments for the extension of the rights and freedoms of women in British society formed an important strand of the cultural revolution, a revolution with which some members of the club were more comfortable than others. The subsequent and much more difficult debate about the admission of lady members to the club will be discussed in the next and final chapter. For the moment, however, a last word from the *Express* newspaper group, in the form of Osbert Lancaster's cartoon of 18 February 1975, in which Maudie Littlehampton disconcerts an episcopal member by asking whether it is true that 'even the Athenæum's thinking of going bi-sexual' (Plate 35).[153]

12

PLUS ÇA CHANGE

Today, many of the young guides who lead walking tours from Trafalgar Square to Buckingham Palace pause at Decimus Burton's clubhouse, where they stand in front of the club's famous portico, under the aegis of Athena, and explain the workings of 'the British Establishment' to tourists. To join the Athenæum, some declare, your grandfather had to have been a member, and your name had to be put down before birth. Journalists can also be wide of the mark, as when the club was described in the *Daily Mail* as 'a favourite watering hole for cabinet ministers and other members of high society'.[1] In both cases the target is actually Clubland, often regarded with a sense of astonishment that such a cluster of grand private societies should still exist in a country whose economic power and global influence have declined since the Second World War. The historian Robert Tombs ends his study on the English with a critique of what he calls 'declinism', a widespread alarm about decline which has been 'increasingly fixed on economic performance' since the 1950s.[2] In contrast, this specialist in French history applies to England the epigram, '*plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*'. The 'Establishment', he argues, 'after faltering, proved remarkably resilient and adaptive. It would have been hard to imagine during the 1960s that, half a century on, the monarchy would be revered, the public schools booming, gentlemen's clubs expanding, the armed forces almost above criticism, the Prime Minister [David Cameron] an Etonian, and Cambridge and Oxford hailed as Europe's leading universities. Like much in England, they changed and remained the same.' Nowhere was this more true than at the Athenæum.

This final chapter considers the paradox that greater changes in the Athenæum's constitution, tone and activities have taken place since the mid-1980s than in any previous period, changes that reflect an accommodation to consumerism; and yet the club has remained the same, retaining a strong sense of tradition, claiming a unique identity for itself as 'more than just another London club', and maintaining principles embodied in its foundation through its members' professional contribution to the national life. In the 1960s the Athenæum was still famed for its high thinking and plain living, whereas in the 1990s it began to invest heavily in the refurbishment of its facilities and in creating comfortable amenities for its members and guests. These changes were part of a process of reinvention that included the introduction of women members, from 2002, and an increase in private entertaining and diaried events. Whereas ballots used to be held in order to elect new members from a long list of candidates, they are now needed to determine which members can secure a place at one of the many and varied events in the club's calendar which are oversubscribed.

First, then, the changes, beginning with the improvement of the estate. The enhancement of the clubhouse became possible only after the club's finances had been stabilised and some of its treasures sacrificed. Two years after Alfred Goldstein and his Executive Committee had organised the sale of the club's prized Meryon prints in 1983,[3] a further raid on the club's assets was contemplated. Patrick Gilbert, general secretary of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, announced from the chair at a General Committee meeting in October 1985 that he, together with Keith Davey, formerly legal advisor to the Department of the Environment, and Richard Smith, the probationary secretary, had met the club's solicitors to discuss amendments to the new lease agreement. After discussion it was agreed that, following the decision of the Executive Committee, Rysbrack's bust of Alexander Pope would be sent to auction 'in order to cover much of the cost of the new lease'. No fewer than thirteen members of the General Committee had sent their apologies to the meeting, including the chairman, Sir Basil Hall, legal advisor to the Broadcasting Complaints Commission, Donald Coggan, formerly Archbishop of Canterbury, and Sir David Wilson, director of the British Museum.[4] When Sir Basil returned to the chair a month later it was agreed that the club would have 'lost its Pope but gained eternal life'.[5] By Christmas the National Portrait Gallery had acquired the

bust for £250,000 and in January an 'excellent marble dust copy' was displayed on the central mantelpiece of the drawing room.[6] A private sale overseas would have raised more funds, but the playful suggestion that a special entry should be made in the Benefactors' Book concerning the club's 'gift' of the bust to the nation was not taken up. (The official history of the Athenæum Collection reports that the bust was sold after a spate of burglaries, as it was too vulnerable to be kept in the clubhouse.[7] It was also too valuable to insure.) In the light of experience, the club now reserves funds annually in anticipation of lease renewal from the Crown Estate Commissioners in 2084.

Senior current members recall the later 1980s as a period during which there was no budget, the lavatories tended to block, the roof leaked, the wrong paint was applied to the pillars of the portico, the archive was scattered among numerous cubby-holes around the clubhouse and some committee chairmen refused to communicate with their fellow chairmen. Sir Basil Hall, however, and his even more 'quiet and unostentatious' successor as chairman, Judge Paul Baker,[8] began the process of improving conditions in the clubhouse; and this process continued between 1989, when Sir Alcon Copisarow, a government scientist turned management consultant, became chairman, and 1998, when Lord Cuckney took the chair and began a series of investigations into current practice.[9]

The most significant building works in those years were initiated in 1996, when Ian Hay Davison, chairman of the Executive Committee, and the secretary, Richard Smith, masterminded the removal of most of the staff who slept in the upper floors to external accommodation, in order to provide more bedrooms and en suite facilities for members. The number of bedrooms increased to twenty-three and they could 'accommodate wives'.[10] At the 1998 AGM the chairman, David Thomson, announced that these works, costing £700,000 in all, had not only been beneficial to members but would also have 'a positive effect on the economic health of the Club'. From that day to this the Athenæum has prioritised the maintenance of its economic health, closely linked in the minds of successive Executive Committees with the enhancement of its facilities for members and their guests. By 1998 many of those guests, whether dormitory wives or lady visitors in the coffee room, were female, and Britain had been transformed into a consumer society under Margaret Thatcher, with John Major and Tony Blair in her wake.

It was after the decision to admit women members had been announced, in March 2001, when more members from the worlds of finance and commerce were represented on the Executive Committee than formerly, that the process of upgrading the clubhouse's facilities accelerated. First, almost £1 million was expended on rebuilding and re-equipping the kitchens in 2002, thus making it possible to employ a leading chef, Ross Hayden, to head the catering team.[11] At Hayden's funeral in October 2015 the secretary, Jonathan Ford, paid tribute to his exemplary service, speaking of 'the Club's reputation for having the worst food in Clubland before Ross joined and the transformation in quality that he delivered'.[12] Second, the refurbishment of the garden room, formerly the ladies' annexe in the basement, was completed in September 2007, thus improving the setting for many of the club's most popular Talk Dinners and for the meetings and casual dining that took place there when other rooms were occupied. Third, in 2009, the Executive Committee, chaired by Lesley Knox, recommended that the sum of £650,000 be drawn from the club's savings and applied to the refurbishment of the bedrooms, raising them to the standard of a smart hotel, and the restoration of the original smoking room, most of which had been hidden from view by the plaster walls and false ceilings of some extra bedrooms that had been created in 1958 (Plate 36).[13] This charming space on the second floor, with its elegant plasterwork and bookshelves, was furnished with comfortable modern armchairs and sofas, to create a second drawing room in which members and their guests could be served a sandwich lunch and drinks, and which could be used for further club meetings and private events taking place in an increasingly busy clubhouse. By the second decade of the twenty-first century the clubhouse had been transformed into a gleaming palace, the result of a rolling programme of refurbishment and redecoration, overseen by the club's highly effective secretary.

Much of the drive for change came from the Executive Committee, to whom most of the credit also goes for absorbing the financial shocks associated with the enhancement of the clubhouse, particularly after 2009, when insufficient funds were paid back into savings, thus causing an unintended major loss and a financial situation from which Peter Chapman, a senior advisor to the Bank of England, rescued the club. The Executive Committee, chaired by women since 2008,[14] reports to the General Committee, which is responsible

for the club's direction of travel. So it was the General Committee that asked the membership to consider a more fundamental change by addressing the vexed question of female membership three times between 1984 and 2001. In 1983, the year in which Mrs Thatcher was returned to power with a majority of 144, the General Committee established a working party, led by its previous chairman, Sir David Hunt, to consider the question of 'lady members'. Halfway through the working party's deliberations, the committee was mortified to learn that a female candidate had been entered in the Candidates Book, truly a Bateman moment (see Plate 29). On 7 December 1983 the late Mary Warnock, philosopher and senior research fellow of St Hugh's College, Oxford, was proposed by Lord Nathan, her contemporary as an undergraduate in the 1940s, and seconded by Sir Richard Southwood FRS, professor of zoology at the university.[15] In response, the General Committee sought agreement from her supporters that the nomination should be held over until 1985, by which time the question of lady members might have been resolved, and then fretted about the problem of confidentiality associated with a Candidates Book which needed to be readily accessible to members.[16] The report of the working party was circulated to members before the 1984 AGM. Its main conclusion was that, 'in the present age, when Parliament, the ancient Universities and learned societies, to mention three institutions with which our links are close, have abolished distinctions of sex it is desirable that the Athenæum should conform to the best modern practice. By not admitting Ladies eligible under our criteria the Club is depriving itself of potential Members of quality.'[17] The stage was thus set for a series of discussions in which those who supported the working party's position were to emphasise the last point concerning potential members of quality, while those who opposed it emphasised that the Athenæum was not an institution but a private gentleman's club.

As is usual in Clubland, much heat was generated by procedural wrangles during these discussions. Sir Basil Hall presented the 1984 AGM with a resolution to alter Rule XXVII, so that the two-thirds majority rule for constitutional changes would be applied to the number of those who voted in a referendum rather than the total ordinary membership.[18] Here was an easy target for the combative Patrick (later Lord) Cormack MP, whose list of recreations in a remarkably long entry in *Who's Who* includes 'avoiding sitting on fences'. The

minutes record that he 'thought it was quite wrong, and indeed indefensible, that the Rules should be changed in order to obtain a result which the Committee obviously wanted. It seemed to him that this was in line with the worst of modern practice and if Lady Members were to be admitted on the basis proposed by the Committee he would certainly resign'. The rules were changed but Cormack did not resign.

One hundred and sixty members attended the EGM held the following January to debate the question of 'lady membership'. The minutes of the meeting summarise a renewed attack from Cormack in which he argued that the proposal would be divisive and 'might lead to resignations'.[19] Thanks to Alfred Goldstein's having assembled all the papers associated with these discussions, we also have access to the notes of the secretary's secretary, Anne Hegarty, which add, in truncated form, that Cormack said, 'Executive Committee wanted to bounce the Members', at which point the chairman interrupted.[20] Cormack continued, 'It left a nasty taste in many people's mouths.' According to the official minutes, Colonel Fleming Burns said that 'the motion to introduce lady membership would indicate a fundamental change in the Club; in his view most changes are changes for the worse, and he felt that time should be given to reflect upon this decision. He said that the voices of women in gossip in the public areas of the Club, however acceptable in general conversation elsewhere, would inhibit serious reading and research.' Hegarty's notes on Burns's speech offer a more colourful version: 'He knows there are many sorts of women eg. an ancient people such as the Amazons; whose women boast only one breast, but we are sensible to know that these cultures are only mythological! It is advisable to know if one is addressing a man or a woman. However were not given the ability to speak in baritone voices. I like the voices of women but I do note that any serious reading is impossible while these voices are taking place [sic].'

Goldstein's speech against the 'notion of lady membership' was more measured. 'If the Athenæum were an Institution', he said, 'the argument would follow, but it is a Gentleman's Club, a second home.' Supporters of the notion included Professor Ghita Ionescu of the University of Manchester, who invoked Pallas Athene and said that 'the Club was losing now the benefit of having half of the British intelligentsia as members', and London University's Professor

Eric Hobsbawm, the darling of the left, who was 'honoured to be elected to an assembly of persons of distinction' and who did not agree that 'females of distinction would change the character of the Club'.[21] Following the circulation of referendum papers which included a list of the arguments against, 806 members voted for the admission of women and 608 against.[22] Mary Warnock, who had been elected Mistress of Girton College, Cambridge, and made a life peer in 1984, never joined the Athenæum.

Having set the matter aside for a decade, on the basis that attitudes were not likely to change rapidly, the General Committee decided to test the waters at the 1994 AGM, when Colin Leach, formerly bursar of Pembroke College Oxford and now chairman of the Executive Committee, proposed that the General Committee 'be encouraged to hold a postal ballot' on membership for women.[23] He was seconded by Sir David Hunt, who had chaired the original working party on the subject. Many of the minuted thirty-one 'main points' in the ensuing discussion were perfectly sensible. In a written ballot, sixty-three members voted in favour of the proposal and sixty-seven against. At a subsequent meeting of the General Committee its chairman, Sir Paul Osmond, formerly Attlee's private secretary, decided not to proceed with a postal ballot.[24]

Osmond's successor, David Thomson, in turn handed on the chairmanship in 1998 to Lord Cuckney, whose varied experience as an intelligence officer in MI6 – always useful at the Athenæum – and as one the most astute industrial 'fixers' of his generation equipped him to bring a more managerial approach to the club's governance.[25] In February 1999 he proposed that a 'strategic review of the future of the club' be initiated in the autumn, in the light of the strong feelings among the membership on the question of women members which had led to some resignations, and of the fact that some had not joined because the club did not admit women.[26] The weighting of the first question put to members in a survey of April 2000 reflected the General Committee's position: 'Candidates for membership must be "persons of attainment in any field where their work is of an intellectual nature and of substantial value to the community". This criterion for membership does not specify gender. Should the Club continue the convention of only considering male candidates who meet the

criterion?'[27] In the resultant vote, 345 members said Yes and 818 No. At the subsequent AGM, which proved to be Cuckney's last in the chair, bad feeling was expressed concerning the committee's tactics over the previous year.[28]

Cuckney's successor, Brian Gilmore, a retired senior civil servant, came to be regarded as the club's master strategist. He believed that the divisive plotting and whispering campaigns fomented by opposing cliques in the late 1990s could threaten the very existence of the club if allowed to continue. He therefore pressed for the ten-year moratorium from 1994 to be set aside and for the matter to be settled quickly, one way or another. In pursuit of this goal he read every letter that Cuckney had received on the subject, spent much time in the clubhouse hearing the views of members informally, arranged open meetings at which strong opinions could be aired rather than whispered, and wrote to all members at all stages. As a result, a much calmer mood prevailed in the clubhouse by the time that the 'Great Debate' was held at 6 p.m. on 14 December 2000, the very day of the annual Christmas lunch, one of the most bibulous events in the club's calendar. One hundred and eighty-three members attended the meeting.[29] David Thomson opened the case for change by arguing that the founding of the Athenæum in 1824 had itself been an 'act of change' in response to the needs of the rising professional classes after the Napoleonic wars, and that the club's original aim of representing 'people with intellectual interests' had always marked it out from other, purely social clubs such as Boodle's or Brooks's. Thomson asserted that the admission of women would lead to greater use of the clubhouse, and that there would also be a 'much better flow of potential male candidates coming forward for membership'. Patrick Cormack, the natural choice as spokesman for the status quo, had withdrawn in light of his public role. He was replaced at short notice by the convivial Malcolm Bishop, whose high-minded argument was more reminiscent of Lord Chesterfield than of Croker. The Athenæum, he suggested, being a 'Club of Gentlemen', enriched the whole of English society as a 'School for Gentlemen'. The journalist and historian Philipp Blom seconded Thomson with a speech warning against discrimination and a dwindling membership, to which Bernard Brook-Partridge, a barrister and businessman, responded by arguing against the 'tyranny' of political correctness. (Among Brook-Partridge's recreations listed in *Who's Who* is 'being difficult'.)

A large number of speeches from the floor followed, including a notable defence of the cultivation of diversity from the international museum consultant, Dr Peter Cannon-Brookes, who pleaded for a No vote; an admission from the late Professor David Kerr, formerly Dean of the Royal Postgraduate Medical School, that he had changed his mind on the question after meeting 'distinguished lady professors, lady deans, lady directors of public health', and so on; and an intervention from a 'relatively new boy', the diplomat and international funding advisor, Desmond Cecil, later a chairman and trustee, who was not 'in favour' of any kind of membership, including male, but who had joined 'an association of individuals of attainment; an association of creativity, of distinction, of fellowship'. In the subsequent postal ballot, conducted by the Electoral Reform Society, 1,160 members voted Yes to the inclusion of women, 489 No, and 49 returned invalid papers. This clear majority came as a relief to all, as it put an end to the cliques and conspiracies. By June 2002 the master strategist could report to the AGM that there was 'no blood on the carpet, no publicity in the newspapers and a total of 10 resignations before and after the vote', and that there were already '44 excellent new members and a further 22 in the Candidates Book'.[30]

The so-called First Ladies were both eminent and 'interesting', in an Athenian sense. Unsurprisingly, their profiles were similar to those of the men who had supported their candidacy, and the range of their professional backgrounds matched that of the membership at large, with an emphasis upon science and medicine, scholarship in the humanities, and public service. The first twenty-five women members to be elected by the General Committee in November 2001, with effect from 1 January 2002, included three baronesses, one Honourable, one Dame, two Ladies, one Right Honourable Lady Justice, eight professors and four doctors (of philosophy).[31] As pioneers and members of an initially tiny minority they exhibited the kind of independence of mind and spirit that had always been regarded as an asset at the Athenæum. (Significantly, they have never met as a body or created a group or coterie.) Their reminiscences, privately published by the club in 2013, make frequent reference to the civilised way in which they had been first received by members and staff, with one notable exception.[32] A number of contributors reveal their sensitivity to the manner of their reception by interpreting the rudeness of one notoriously moody former

member of staff as misogynistic behaviour, when in fact he could be equally difficult with male members of the club.

Although only a small minority of male Athenians remain in the club in spite of the presence of women members, there exists one area of more general sensitivity. A month before the first admission of women, the General Committee asserted its firmly held view that 'the special nature and atmosphere of the Club, and the part the dress code plays in maintaining this, are principal factors of many members' enjoyment'.[33] In 2003 the committee elected Sir John Tavener as a 'super-eminent' Rule II member. He 'preferred not to wear a tie', however, and when his request to substitute a cravat was turned down he did not take up his membership.[34] Five years later a survey of members revealed that 64.3 per cent were not in favour of a change to the dress code and 35.7 per cent were in favour.[35] Meanwhile a sense of mild resentment had been expressed privately by many formally dressed men that some of the women were not meeting the club's agreed standards. Only a woman member could raise the issue at a meeting, however, and it was the biologist Professor Catherine Rice-Evans who addressed the 2010 AGM on the subject, noting that 'all the men present were very elegant because their dress code was clear' and asking to have the same standard for women, as the present guidelines were 'currently not very clear and widely interpreted by some Members'.[36] Although subsequent attempts were made to formalise matters, the disparity remained.

On a happier note, another landmark was reached in 2018 when Jane Barker, formerly the CEO of Equitas Limited and finance director of the London Stock Exchange, became the first woman to chair the General Committee. Ironically, it was during her watch that the question of the dress code exercised some members once again. Following an open meeting in February 2019, a ballot was administered by Electoral Reform Services, who reported that two-thirds of the 2,293 ordinary members had voted and 76 per cent of those who voted wanted ties as well as jackets to be removable in exceptionally hot conditions. More significantly, the majority for there being no further change in the dress code was much smaller than in 2008, the result being 783:715. The strength of feeling on the subject that was subsequently expressed at the 2019 AGM indicated that the question would remain in the

club's pending tray. Meanwhile the vexed question of the dress code for women continued to be quietly avoided.

David Thomson's prediction in 2000 that the admission of women would lead to a better flow of potential male candidates proved to be incorrect: numbers of male candidates remained steady, while the total number of candidates rose appreciably. His belief that the admission of women would lead to a greater use of the clubhouse is more difficult to assess, not least because the club's enhanced programme of events has had at least as great an impact in this respect. Indeed, the expansion of the programme has been the most significant factor in a process of change and reinvention at the Athenæum. An awareness of the need for a more proactive approach to diaried events can be dated from the mid-1980s, when Club Table was also formalised.[37] In 1986 three events – a sherry party for new members, a Grouse Dinner and a members' Christmas Luncheon – were incorporated in the calendar. (It was noted at the subsequent AGM that the use of the clubhouse had increased.)[38] That was also the year in which the General Committee agreed to a request from the technical director of British Nuclear Fuels plc, Dr William Wilkinson, who had recently been elected, that his membership be delayed for one year due to 'pressure of work'.[39] The increase in the number of official serviced events was a response to modern patterns of residence and 'pressure of work'. In Croker's day, most members lived and / or worked near the clubhouse and could drop in frequently, in order to read the papers, pick up the latest gossip and perhaps have lunch or dinner in the coffee room. Today's programme of talks, concerts, films, discussion groups, dining groups and wine tastings, which is designed to attract increasingly busy working members to the clubhouse, to entertain its retired habitués and to bring members together, would have astounded the original members, although not quite as much as the popular outside visits to libraries, historic houses, theatres, motor rallies and ski slopes.

Even the first Talk Dinners were regarded as an experiment in 1926.[40] Once they moved to the coffee room, however, with an initial ceiling of 130 in attendance, they became a club institution, offering an opportunity to hear first from an authority on a subject of general interest (formerly an Athenian but later possibly a non-member) and then from members and guests in the audience

during a chaired discussion on the subject. Much depends upon the quality of the speakers and the ability of the Talk Dinner Committee to identify and recruit them. At the 1993 AGM, chaired by Sir Paul Osmond, the 'brilliance' of the sub-committee was credited with 'having been responsible to some extent for the increased use of the clubhouse during 1992'.[41] In 1994 the ophthalmologist Professor Robert Weale, chairman of the sub-committee, 'alluded to the difficulty which had been created by having more Club Talk Dinners than members who were willing to speak'.[42] Moreover, during a subsequent trial period, when members could invite a male or female guest, a complicated arrangement was made whereby both the dress code and the gender of guests would be varied over a season.[43] Today these dinners are open to members and one guest, dressed in lounge suit or equivalent, with a charge of £68 for members and £78 for guests. The Athenæum is no longer 'the poor man's club', if it ever was.[44]

Dr Yolande Hodson, the map historian and former chairman of the Talk Dinner Committee, has categorised the talks given between 1988 and 2010 as follows: science and technology 61; art, drama and literature 39; religion 27; international perspectives (especially ambassadorial) 25; architecture/heritage 24; politics / government 22; public service 15; music 13; and history 10. The supremacy of science and technology (which here includes medicine) reflects the professional profile of the membership, whereas the low number of talks on music and history is surprising, given that these are the main private passions of many of today's members, judging by the conversation at Club Table and at other gatherings in the clubhouse. Something of the range and quality of club Talk Dinners can be gauged by considering those held in any one year. In 1988, a year chosen at random, the art historian Andrew Wilton introduced a discussion on 'Is Turner our national painter?'; Sir Harry Hookway, the former and first chief executive of the British Library, spoke on 'What is the information explosion?'; the place-names expert Dr John Dodgson asked, 'Can this age appreciate classical literature?'; Martyn Goff, administrator of the Booker Prize, considered 'Books today & tomorrow: universal communication or a minority hobby?'; the physician Dr Alex Sakula examined 'The bridge on the River Kwai: facts & fiction'; and Dr (later Sir) Roger Scruton looked at 'The pursuit of truth'. Only Dodgson was a non-member.

As with other diaried events, demand for the flagship Talk Dinners is greater than the supply of places available, with the result that the ballot has become controversial, particularly as some members apply for a large number of events in the hope of succeeding with some of them, leaving others with nothing. (Members are sometimes encouraged to apply by their spouses or partners, who are potential guests.) For a brief period it was decided to publish the number of applications for places at Talk Dinners, which inevitably meant that members could see which speakers and subjects were most popular. In 2014 the two most sought-after speakers were both non-members: the Conservative politician Sir Malcolm Rifkind spoke on 'Punching above our weight?' (470 applications for 150 places); and the conductor Sir Mark Elder on 'Two giants from 1813 – Verdi and Wagner' (469 applications).[45] Patrick Derham, headmaster of Westminster School and also a non-member, topped the poll in 2015 with a talk on 'Educating: a liberating force' (488 applications).

Talk Lunches, smaller spin-off events that are held in the refurbished garden room, have proved to be as popular as Talk Dinners. In 2014, for example, 442 applications were made for the 85 places at 'Murder and mystery: P.D. James and Ruth Rendell in conversation'.[46] Demand is usually also high for the annual Athenæum Lecture (in 2014 Sir Richard Sykes on 'The interaction and future of universities and commerce' attracted 309 applications) and for lectures organised to mark special occasions, as when the military historian Sir Max Hastings commemorated the centenary of the beginning of the First World World (548 applications). The popularity of Library Dinners and Lunches and Archive Dinners and Lunches, held in the garden room, reflects not only the membership's sustained interest in their outstanding library and archive, but also the events' more relaxed structure: a talk and brief questions are *followed* by convivial eating. Whereas formal talks and communal eating have largely become separate activities outside Clubland, the number of combined events has actually increased at the Athenæum: Forum Dinners aim to bring different generations together by taking topical subjects, announced only a month before each dinner; Wine Dinners and Lunches tackle a favourite club theme; Works of Art Committee Dinners are just that; and the Poetry Series, masterminded by poet and government official David Morphet, and now numbering over fifty meetings, combine discussions and readings of poetry with dinner. Other

diaried events include the Athenæum Concert and, most recently, semi-staged operas in the drawing room (necessitating its closure for three days), as well as Interclub Duplicate Bridge, Social Golf and the Film Society, and hardy annuals such as the Summer Party, the Chess Dinner, the Christmas Lunch and the St Cecilia Concert, this last accompanied by printed booklets of verse and prose edited by Paul Tempest, formerly of the Bank of England. There are even Quiz Nights.

In 2016 the chairman of the General Committee, Graham Nicholson, formerly chief legal advisor to the Governor of the Bank of England, began his report at the end of his first year in office with these words:

> The sections of this Report detailing the events held in the Clubhouse and elsewhere over the year bear testimony to the vibrancy of the Club; not only Talk Dinners and Library, Works of Art and Wine Committee events but also music, film and poetry. I doubt that there has been a time in the Club's history when such variety and quality has been on offer; with the popularity of the events evidenced by the high level of applications for the ballot, and of course, corresponding disappointment on the part of unsuccessful applicants. Although it is perhaps invidious to pick out a particular event, the three nights of *The Marriage of Figaro* in March of this year were especially memorable.[47]

Nicholson is certainly correct in his historical assessment, and much the same could have been said by the chairmen of those other leading London clubs that have also expanded their programmes of events, and for similar reasons. In the case of the Athenæum, however, with its long and distinctive tradition of quiet scholarship and private conversation, his celebration of the club's 'vibrancy' strikes a new note.

The various forms of Talk Dinner that are in greatest demand at the Athenæum would, however, be regarded as rather cerebral in some clubs. The same is true of some of the unofficial and unserviced groups of members that meet regularly in the clubhouse, and whose activities are not organised by sub-committees or mentioned in Annual Reports. The oldest of these is the Discussion Group, which began life in a small way in 1964. The group meets

monthly to dine in the coffee room before retiring to one of the smaller rooms in the clubhouse for a short presentation by one of its members, followed by discussion. The historian and broadcaster Christopher Lee, a current member of the group, outlined its history at a dinner to mark the half-century in June 2014. In the early years, between five and seven members of the group would meet with no announced agenda and no nominated speaker, and it was twenty-five years before the first presentation was made on a topical event. The heterogeneity of the topics presented reflects the varied currents of individuals' intellectual pursuits rather than current affairs. At the moment of the Falklands War, Lee pointed out, nine gathered in the north library to contemplate dreams and dismissed Freud as one who interpreted them too narrowly. Membership is by invitation of the group as a whole, which numbers between twenty-five and thirty. For many years the minutes of these evenings ended with the observation, 'an animated discussion ensued'. 'Isn't that the delight of the whole affair?' mused Lee: 'Fifty years of lively and animated discussion in a good company.'

Rabbi Professor Dan Cohn-Sherbok, long a member of the Discussion Group, was one of the moving spirits behind the more recently formed lunchtime group for literary members entitled the Algæ, which he chairs. Here the winning formula of communal eating combined with informed discussion on a topic presented by a member has been adapted to the professional interests of those who write and publish on a regular basis. So whereas a presentation to the Discussion Group might celebrate the novels of Tolstoy, an Algæ paper would probably include consideration of the problems associated with researching and writing about the novels of Tolstoy. Both these informal groups of members consider themselves to represent an essential strand of this 'literary' club's historic identity and ethos, gathering for discussion without guests being present. The chairmen of some of the better discussions held at these unofficial meetings will often close by commenting that those present have participated in a 'truly Athenian' event, and the same is said at some of the diaried Talk Dinners and lunches. As David Thomson commented at the Great Debate, unlike 'purely social clubs', the Athenæum is for 'people with intellectual interests'.

Like all major London clubs, the Athenæum has a long tradition of allowing and even encouraging external groups whose membership includes as least one

of its own to hold occasional meetings, usually associated with lunch or dinner, in the clubhouse.[48] The Essay Club arrived in 2001, having started life at the Holborn Restaurant in 1907, tried various restaurants, settled at Bertorelli's and then moved to the Savile, where they lost the room in which they met to refurbishment.[49] The Study of Parliament Group held its first annual dinner at the Athenæum in 1965, when dinner cost £2 including sherry and wine, or £1 for teetotallers; later they tried other clubs.[50] Other visiting groups include the OWLS (Old Whitley Lags), the Romney Street group founded in 1917, the London Society for the Study of Religion and numerous others, including groups associated with schools, universities, livery companies and regiments.

These external groups tend to migrate, depending on the health of their Athenian member or members, or on changes of habitat at the clubhouse. In May 1998 the late Patrick Rivett, a member of the club and the first professor of operational research outside the USA, wrote to David Thomson, then chairman of the General Committee, as follows: 'I run a luncheon club named in honour of Patrick Blackett which meets three times a year in the Picture room. I also run three other groups, each of which meets once a year in the club. The latter groups will now no longer meet in the club simply because it is far too expensive and I am under pressure also to move the Blackett group elsewhere. It costs us an extra £20.00 per person to eat in a private room compared with the same meal in public.'[51] (The pressure to which Rivett refers includes the fact that the club did not then admit women members.)

As we have seen, the year 1998 marked the beginning of an era of change, in which successive Executive Committees took active steps to improve the economic health of the club by improving its facilities, thereby justifying commercial rates for room charges and encouraging an increase in what the retail sector calls 'footfall'. That increase has been achieved partly through the development of a full calendar of events and group activities, and partly through other changes that are mentioned in Graham Nicholson's report of 2016. 'High utilisation of the Coffee Room and bedrooms', he wrote, 'together with the use made by Members of Club rooms for private events has contributed to another financially successful year.'[52] Private dining has been a feature of club life since the late nineteenth century, when objections were made to the presence in the clubhouse of 'strangers' attending 'Members' Dinners' behind the closed doors

of the morning room. When Lord Morley, for example, the Liberal statesman and author, and the publishing Macmillan brothers, entertained their colleagues and clients to saddle of mutton and numerous other courses, they trod the fine line between entertaining, or networking, and actual business or fund-raising.[53] During the twentieth century these dinners, reduced to a few courses, migrated to the small libraries and the picture room, and today it is often impossible to obtain a book from the north or west library at lunchtime because the room is occupied by a private party. The club's banqueting department is very busy, organising not only dinners and lunches, but also drinks receptions, wedding receptions and other large-scale private events.

The high utilisation of the bedrooms to which Nicholson refers, following their refurbishment, has had a similar effect to that of the ballot for diaried events: members have to book well in advance and are often unsuccessful in obtaining a room, not least because of the number of reciprocal members from overseas clubs who take advantage of the facility during their stays in London. The high utilisation of the coffee room also reflects an increase in the number of non-members in the clubhouse, as the private entertainment of groups of guests, sometimes sizeable groups, at lunch or dinner has become commonplace in recent years. The proportion of members to guests has diminished, and whereas in the 1830s gales of laughter might have emanated from Theodore Hook's 'Temperance Corner', to the disapproval of other, less outgoing members in the coffee room, today they often come from the friends, families or colleagues of members. Similarly, although the drawing room, originally described by Decimus Burton as 'the Library' and later by Kipling as like a cathedral between services,[54] remains peaceful in the mornings, it can be difficult to read there during post-prandial periods. The author recalls a young family friend of his giggling over coffee when she noticed a member taking a nap on a nearby chaise longue designed by Burton. She was amused by somebody 'sleeping in public', when in fact he was sleeping in private, in his own clubhouse.

The question arises whether the enhancement of the clubhouse's facilities has been for the benefit of the members or their guests, and whether the level of private entertaining that is now a regular feature of club life has changed the tone of the clubhouse. The popularity of Club Table, however, the number of

members applying for the various kinds of Talk Dinners and lunches described earlier, the strict rules concerning mobile telephones, the maintenance of an excellent library and archive, and of silence in the south library, all represent continuity of emphasis and practice. Future General Committees will want to consider how a balance can be maintained between the needs of members who wish to entertain in the clubhouse and those of members who regard it as a quiet haven. (In 1823 Sir Humphry Davy encouraged Croker to remember the 'retiring philosophers whom it is always desirable to bring into the living world'.[55])

The first item in a 'policy checklist' approved by the General Committee in October 2002 aimed to achieve this balance: 'The Club exists to provide Members with an agreeable place to relax, to entertain friends, and to enjoy the company of fellow Members with achievements of an intellectual or creative nature and of value to the community.'[56] The wording echoes Brian Gilmore's prophetic comments at the AGM held four months earlier:

> With so much going on, the Chairman wants to pay particular attention to an asset of the Club which does not have anyone speaking for it. This is the importance which members attach to being able to walk into the Clubhouse and find a place to relax. There have been various comments recently suggesting that at times the Club is very busy. That's a sign of success and a sign that the Club is doing things which members want; but we are not going to forget the many members who also want to be able to have a place to sit quietly and relax.[57]

For Athenians past and present, sitting quietly and relaxing usually means reading.

So far in this chapter we have considered various kinds of change in the life of the Athenæum. We now turn to the membership and its profile, where the emphasis falls upon continuity and '*la même chose*'. First, however, a word about the staff and another kind of continuity which is reflected in an extraordinary record of retention – a sure sign of job satisfaction for those working in a happy ship. The club has seventy-eight members of staff, twenty-three of

whom have served for five to ten years, eleven for ten to fifteen years, ten for fifteen to twenty years, seven for twenty to thirty years, and three for over thirty years.[58] Three of the four assistant managers have worked in the club for more than twelve years, which has done much for the stability and continuity of service to members, who regularly express their appreciation to all the staff. The secretary has served for twenty-two years.

As we have seen throughout the history of the club, the election of candidates is based upon ability and clubbability rather than birth and background. (A distinction made in the 1820s between personal acquaintance with the candidate and 'a knowledge of his works' is retained in the Candidates Book to this day.)[59] Dynasticism is therefore less common at the Athenæum than elsewhere in Clubland; and where it does figure, it tends to take the form of descent from intellectual families or of association with specific centres of intellectual activity. Christopher (Palgrave) Barker, who was born in 1927, elected in 1972 and died in 2017, recalled being taken to the clubhouse at the age of seven by his father to see the Silver Jubilee celebrations for King George V. He described the Athenæum as the 'family club' – his forebears included Dawson Turner (elected in 1824)[60] and Francis Turner Palgrave (1854) – and regarded himself as having been unworthy of election. The musician and author Jeremy Barlow was equally self-deprecating when delivering a Library Dinner talk in 2013 on the extensive Darwin / Barlow connections at the Athenæum.[61] Other current members who have been moved to talk about their Athenian forebears include Anne Chisholm on her grandfather Hugh Chisholm, editor of the renowned 11th edition of *Encylopædia Britannica* (1911); Peter Sabine, formerly deputy director of the Geological Survey, on two original members of the club, General Sir Edward Sabine, who served on the council of the Geological Society, and his brother Joseph, a fellow of the society;[62] and Patience Thomson, an authority of dyslexia, on 'The legacy of the two Braggs', a talk which extended beyond personal associations (both her father and her husband David's father were Nobel laureates) to the club's continuous connection with the Royal Institution since 1824.[63] None of these current members of their families' club is a passive heir, and all 'value particularly the life of the intellect, arts and sciences'.

The Athenæum has always considered itself to be 'more than just another London club',[64] an assessment which has been confirmed by neutral observers.

In 1962 Anthony Sampson reported that, within Clubland, only the Athenæum was 'completely *sui generis*': 'there the bishops are being bishops, the professors are professors, the eccentrics are eccentric, and the dull, distinguished men sit in their deep leather chairs in the silence room [the south library], where no one can disturb them. And they hold to themselves the secret of setting themselves, ostentatiously, at ease, and leaving their interlocutors puzzled, embarrassed, gratified but obscurely discomfited.'[65] Non-members are far less likely to be patronised or embarrassed at today's more informal Athenæum. The bishops are still being bishops, but less grandly. In 2014 Andrew Brown, a commentator on Church affairs, noted that John Habgood (Archbishop of York, 1983–95), the last Etonian to be an archbishop before Justin Welby, 'once told the Synod that one of his ideas had come to him in the bath at the Athenaeum: that was the sort of place where his sort of bishop did his sort of thinking'.[66] Of the five other archbishops who are current members, three were educated at grammar schools, one at a secondary modern and one at a government-aided school in Africa. Four of the six are retired, but none is a trustee, in contrast to earlier eras when this was expected.[67]

Bishops are busy, and although one of their number serves on the General Committee, he is usually retired. (Senior female clerics have yet to be elected.) They are also more embattled, serving a society which is critical of the Church's stance on sexuality and its failures in the area of safeguarding. Today there are fewer bishops in the club, even though the Anglican episcopate has grown in number: thirty-one were elected between 1955 and 1984 (including Roman Catholics), whereas only sixteen have joined the club since 1985. Most of the ten current Anglican diocesans in the club make use of the bedroom facilities when they are on duty in the House of Lords or on national bodies. (More have joined the much less expensive Farmers Club, which must please the Church Commissioners.) Bishops are often to be seen working on papers in the south library, eating at Club Table alongside lay members, or discussing Church matters with clerical colleagues over lunch or dinner in the coffee room, in the tradition of Samuel Wilberforce and William Temple.

If the cost of membership gives the bishops pause, however, this is a greater impediment to most other clergy.[68] A member's suggestion at the 1996 AGM that the clergy rates be lowered was 'not widely supported', and the General

Committee thought that, 'in fairness to other low paid professions, such as certain academic posts, an equitable policy would be difficult to achieve'.[69] The chairman, David Thomson, undertook to discuss the matter with at least three retired archbishops in the club, 'to keep them informed and invite their views'. Although no changes were introduced, sixty-eight non-episcopal clergy of all denominations are current members, and two-thirds of them add other titles to their Reverends: there are seven Very Reverends (Deans), two Prebendaries and twelve Canons, for example, as well as one baronet, two Monsignors and a Reverend and Worshipful diocesan chancellor.[70] More telling, however, is the fact that fifteen Reverends are also doctors and six are professors.

In Sampson's terms, the professors are still professors, but there are now many more of them and they are more varied in subject discipline and demeanour, largely as a result of the rapid expansion of higher education in Britain. In the 1960s, when the number of universities doubled from twenty-two to forty-six, the vice-chancellors of several of the new 'plate-glass' universities were members of the club.[71] In the 1980s, when Lord Quirk was vice-chancellor of London University, he found it 'handy' to have informal contact with virtually all the other V-Cs in the country through the club.[72] By 2016 there were 130 universities in the UK and a central bureaucracy to match.

Academic networking goes on all the time in the clubhouse. It becomes controversial when a member's subscription is covered by a public body that is funded by the tax payer. In 2009, for example, a *Daily Mail* headline screamed of Professor David Eastwood, 'The quango gravy train: £1m expenses bill includes £1,000 membership of exclusive club'.[73] In defence of the historian, chief executive of the Higher Education Funding Council for England, an HEFCE spokesman declared that the board had agreed to his membership of the Athenæum when he was appointed, 'considering it represented value for money', as it was used for 'overnight accommodation and meetings with senior representatives of the higher education sector and business'. (The *Mail's* criticism does not apply to all vice-chancellors.) Some of the most regular users of bedroom facilities include senior academics from the provinces who, like diocesan bishops, have to attend national meetings in London. Dame Janet Finch, for example, formerly vice-chancellor of Keele University, has now taken on a number of public roles such as chairing the Nursing and Midwifery Council,

and is often to be seen at Club Table. University chancellors and heads of house at Oxford and Cambridge, not all of whom are academics, have always been well represented at the club. Lord Patten of Barnes, for example, is chancellor of Oxford University and the late Lord Dainton was chancellor of Sheffield; Lord Grabiner is Master of Clare College, Cambridge, Dame Carol Black is principal of Newnham and Lord (Rowan) Williams of Magdalene; Lord Rees of Ludlow is a former Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, Sir Keith Thomas was formerly president of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and Dame Helen Ghosh is Master of Balliol.

The eminence of its more illustrious learned members has always been a source of pride in the club. Their portraits have not been hung in the major public rooms of the clubhouse, but more discreetly in the morning room, where oil paintings of Victorian heroes such as Darwin and Huxley look down on those taking an aperitif, and in the picture room, where a selection of more recent portraits, somewhat randomly acquired, includes one of Isaiah Berlin, another college head who used the clubhouse for academic business.[74] Yet more discreet is the display of black-and-white photographs of members – a family collection in a home from home – in the bedroom corridors on the second and third floors, and largely unknown to members who never stay overnight. Of the sixty-three members portrayed by Anne Purkiss, all but one was elected after 1960 and eighteen since 2000. Their profiles are similar to those of earlier post-war generations:[75] half were educated at grammar schools and in all they include sixteen peers, twenty knights, and one baroness. But the number of professors – fourteen – is higher than in earlier samples, in a club which currently has over six hundred of them on the roll, almost a third of the membership. Among these photographs, fellows of the Royal Society are strongly represented by the president, Lord Rees (Astronomer Royal), the late Professor Sir Joseph Rotblat (physicist and Nobel peace laureate), Sir Tim Hunt (biochemist and molecular physiologist, Nobel laureate), Professor Dame Kay Davies (molecular geneticist), Professor Sir Walter Bodmer (molecular geneticist), Sir John Pendry (physicist) and Professor Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell (astrophysicist). In 1960, 28 per cent of fellows of the Royal Society were members of the club, and in 1996 an arrangement whereby the Royal Society Dining Club met at the clubhouse was confirmed.[76] Among several

other historical links between current fellows and their Athenian forebears are Pendry's associations with the Blackett Laboratory at Imperial College London and the Cockcroft Institute.

John Wilson Croker and Sir Humphry Davy established strong links between the club and the leading learned societies in 1824, and those connections remain in most cases. Since 1985 four of the seven presidents of the Royal Society have been members: Lord Porter of Luddenham, Sir Michael Atiyah, Lord May of Oxford and Lord Rees. In contrast, only two out of nine presidents of the Society of Antiquaries have been members (Michael Robbins and Professor Sir Barry Cunliffe), and not one of the five presidents of the Royal Academy, a statistic to which we will return. The British Academy, however, founded in 1902 as the national academy for the humanities and social sciences and now housed at Carlton House Terrace, has had nine presidents since 1985, six of whom are current members: Lord Quirk, Sir Anthony Kenny, Sir Keith Thomas, the Baroness O'Neill of Bengarve, Lord Stern of Brentford and Sir David Cannadine.

Engineers were even more active than the scientists in administering the fledgling club in the 1820s, and still have a strong presence today. As the late Sir Frederick Warner pointed out in his millennial essay on 'The engineer in society':

> The British Academy has moved alongside the Royal Society in Carlton House Terrace and the Royal Academy of Medical Studies is joining in. Not far away in Westminster is the Royal Academy of Engineering to complete the close geographical association of Academies. This might provide another focus for the Club in the way that the Cosmos Club in Washington is a necessary complement to the Academies there which operate close to the State Department. A small but diverse group continued by self-selection seems to be a workable and agreeable way of transcending the tendency for specialists to collect in cells, academic ghettoes and institutions for mutual inspection.[77]

The current proximity of the learned societies to the clubhouse encourages just the kind of mutuality that was envisaged in 1824.

Sampson's third category in 1962 was the Athenæum's eccentrics. Like bishops in their purple shirts, eccentrics are noticed, particularly in a clubhouse which has a quiet, even scholarly atmosphere. The Reverend Canon Brian Dominick Frederick Titus Brindley (he added the second and fourth names himself) was never going to be a bishop, but he was certainly noticed. When the Anglo-Catholic Vicar of Holy Trinity, Reading, became a Canon of Christ Church in 1985 he acquired a lavish new clerical wardrobe which included buckled shoes with high heels, which he painted red.[78] It was not as a master of high camp, however, that he was presented for election to the club the following year, but rather as a significant liturgist, a Canon of Christ Church and the newly elected chairman of the Business Subcommittee of the General Synod. Following Brindley's fall from grace in 1989, when taped indiscretions, mainly fantasies about young men, were published by the *News of the World* and reported in the *Independent* by the ubiquitous Andrew Brown, Evangelical enemies are reported to have driven him from his various Anglican posts and Archbishop Coggan, a trustee, is said to have called for his expulsion from the club.[79] If such an attempt was made, it failed, as in other similar cases. It was an ailing Brindley, now a Roman Catholic, who invited a group of friends to celebrate his seventieth birthday at his beloved Athenæum clubhouse in 2001. He collapsed during an elaborate private dinner in the north library, between the dressed crab and the *bœuf en daube*, and was given the last rites by Anthony Symondson SJ. (According to his friend Damian Thompson, then a fellow member, the crab was magnificent.) Brindley's death on the floor of the north library seemed utterly fitting and became legendary. (In reality the paramedics had found movement in the heart, and he was declared dead an hour later in St Thomas's Hospital.)[80]

Soberly suited members of the club like to recount the legend, and more than one admits to having disapproved of Brindley's extrovert behaviour and red heels. Disapproval of another eccentric, elected two years earlier than Brindley, had less to do with his hairstyle than his habit of either brooding in solitary silence in a corner of the drawing room, or barging into private conversations at the smaller tables in the coffee room and talking at length about himself. Jimmy Savile OBE and Knight Commander of the Order of St Gregory the Great, was the nation's most successful 'fund-raiser for charity', as he was

described in the Candidates Book.[81] At the time of his election, on 20 February 1984, he had already gained the trust of members of the royal family and of the prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, who made four attempts to secure him a knighthood in the 1980s, against the advice of Sir Robert Armstrong, Secretary of the Cabinet and a member of the club, before she was successful in 1990. Perhaps Sir Robert's veiled warnings were not also passed on to his club. Three days after Savile's election a JAK cartoon entitled 'Jim fixed it for him' appeared in the *Standard*, showing an elderly bishop on the arms of two chorus girls, having successfully applied to the popular television programme *Jim'll Fix It* with an outrageous request. Savile was proud of his membership. (Usually attired in a track suit or shell suit, he kept a formal suit which he wore at the clubhouse, which he used for meetings.)[82] After his death in 2011, and the investigation of over 450 alleged cases of sexual abuse by him, the General Committee of the Athenæum considered whether his membership should be 'expunged from the Club' in order to protect its reputation, and wisely decided against the move on the grounds that history cannot be rewritten.[83]

It would be wrong to assume that Sampson had the club's many civil servants in mind when describing his fourth category of Athenian, the 'dull, distinguished men' sitting in their deep leather chairs. Thanks to the enduring influence of the novels of C.P. Snow and Anthony Powell, however, and of television programmes such as *Yes, Prime Minister*, the club is still assumed to be the place where Sir Humphrey Appleby and his colleagues conduct their most significant business over lunch, as a search of *Hansard* online confirms. Prominent among politicians who refer to the tradition is Charles Clarke MP. In 2003, when he was Secretary of State for Education and Skills, he explained that select committees of the House of Commons had only existed in their current form for the previous twenty years and that this reflected the need for 'increased accountability and scrutiny of modern government'.[84] Six years before the *Daily Mail* article on Professor Eastwood appeared, Clarke went on to say that his department was 'reflecting' on certain kinds of professional relationships and on 'different classes of nods and winks', and that he thought the HEFCE's was 'an Athenæum-type nods and winks operation'. In 2008, when asked about the merits of having a 'strong centre' in government at a meeting of the Public Administration Committee, Clarke said: 'What kind of

centre? I would hope that would be interpreted as a stronger Cabinet Office, and a stronger coordination at the top of the Civil Service which went beyond permanent secretaries having lunch in the Athenæum and some process whereby you were able to pull it together.'

In reality the club could claim only one permanent secretary in 2003, Sir Joseph Pilling, a product of Rochdale Grammar School and Kings College, London, who played a significant role in the continuing peace process in Northern Ireland, and who became chairman of the General Committee in retirement.[85] In 2017 the roll also included Sir Martin Donnelly, interim permanent secretary to the Department for International Trade; Sir Alexander Younger, chief of the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6), whose entry in *Who's Who* is one of the shortest in its history; Sir Mark Walport (2011), government chief scientific advisor; and Patrick McGuinness (1992), deputy national security advisor. Of these four, only McGuinness acknowledges his membership of the Athenæum in *Who's Who*, which might suggest that what was once a badge of honour in Whitehall is now regarded by some as an embarrassment.

Other distinguished senior professionals who might be mistaken for dull men on the basis of external appearance include members of the diplomatic service (in 2012 the roll listed six serving diplomats, including the ambassadors to Rome, Belgrade and Athens, and at least sixteen retired) and the legal profession, which has always been strongly represented among the membership. The display of photographs upstairs includes the late Lord Mackay of Clashfern, Lord Denning and Lord Neill of Bladen, and a current legal member, Lord Nicholls of Birkenhead, formerly a trustee and Second Senior Lord of Appeal. Although extrovert barristers tend to prefer the Garrick, a few add colour to the drawing room of the Athenæum, the natural home of the quieter lawyer. The recent increase in the number of financial and insurance experts in the club reflects the expansion of these sectors in modern Britain. Again, however, it is not the contrarian hedge fund manager but the more sober banker or financial legal advisor who is attracted to the Athenæum. The club's oldest and strongest connection in this regard is with the Bank of England, which completed its Grecian remodelling by Soane at the same time that Decimus Burton's clubhouse was built, and whose governors have usually been members, including most recently the late Lord ('Eddie') George and Lord King of Lothbury, an

active current member. Paul Tempest, the indefatigable editor of house publications such as *The Wit of the Athenæum, 1824–2016, in Light Verse and Bon Mots*, worked for the bank for many years, and Graham Nicholson, formerly the bank's chief legal advisor, has played leading roles in the governance of the club.

As in other senior clubs, there has always been a sprinkling of bankers and businessmen at the Athenæum. The club has guarded against the intrusion of overt business practices, however, as when dictation to secretaries in the hall and the holding of business meetings were banned in the 1950s, and when access to 'E-Mail, the Internet etc' for business purposes was denied in 1998 on the grounds that supplying these facilities would 'alter the nature of the Club'.[86] Again, changes in the professional world outside Clubland have affected life within it, as the historian of White's noted when commenting on the 'noble lord' who is said to have walked out of his club, never to return, on the day that the first stockbroker was elected: 'The trouble really is not that stockbrokers have become members of White's but that members of White's have become stockbrokers.'[87] London's oldest club is particularly alert to changes in the old order of the British Establishment: as Anthony Lejeune adds in his history, 'That David Lloyd George's grandson can be the Chairman of White's surely says something remarkable about British society and about the Club.'[88] (The 3rd Earl Lloyd George of Dwyfor was a Lloyd's underwriter and became chairman of White's in 1993.) At the Athenæum, whose values are closer to those of the liberal arts and sciences, Professor Cohn-Sherbok warned in a millennial essay that the 'growing army of those who work in the financial services and allied industries' would change the club's identity from 'Bishopsgate', as the cabbies used to call it, to another 'Notting Hill Gate', and that before long these wealthy individuals would be 'the only ones who can afford the pleasures of the Athenæum'.[89] While perhaps not always sharing Cohn-Sherbok's apocalyptic perspective, some current members do sometimes feel that the world is too much with us.

Although Croker's concept of a 'literary' club was broad, it is surprising to see how few creative writers there were among the original members of 1824, and that in *Ballot Day 1892* Andrew Lang was the only 'man of letters', in the sense that writing was his profession.[90] (The major Victorian novelists and poets

became members between these dates.) The rise in the number of literary critics and biographers elected to the club in the 1960s and subsequent decades has continued in the present century. Following the deaths of Seamus Heaney in 2013, shortly after unveiling his portrait by Fiona Graham-Mackay (now herself a member), and of P.D. James in 2014, the club's best-known *littérateurs* are now critics, biographers and cultural historians such as the Hon. Victoria Glendinning, Richard Davenport-Hines and Jenny Uglow.[91] Sir Edward Hulton (died 1988) and Lord Weidenfeld of Chelsea (died 2016), both of whom figure in the photographic display upstairs, maintained the club's publishing tradition that was established by the Murrays, Macmillans and Longmans in the nineteenth century, and is continued today by the Hon. Timothy Hely Hutchinson and Michael Fishwick. The club's broader involvement in the book trade has been maintained by the administrator of the Booker Prize, the late Martyn Goff, and by a number of leading literary agents, including Michael Shaw and Bruce Hunter, both of whom were elected in 1986 and later served as trustees, and Georgina Capel. 'Where are the literary salons?' demanded the novelist and journalist Giles Foden in 2008, two years after his election to the club.[92] 'You do still hear intellectual conversation at the venerable institutions of St James's' such as the Reform and the Athenæum, Foden reported, but the membership profile is 'pretty venerable' and the subscriptions 'beyond the pocket of most'.

Judging by the conversation at Club Table and by the subject matter of many of the events that are now held in the clubhouse, the main private passions of today's habitués seem to be music and history, rather than literature in the sense of creative writing. Among the photographs upstairs are members who join a long line of Athenian musicians: Sir Georg Solti, Sir Charles Groves and Lord Menuhin of Stoke d'Abernon, all of whom died in the 1990s, the late Dr John Birch, organist at Chester Cathedral, and Sir Harrison Birtwistle, a current member. Just as there have been more literary critics than creative writers among the membership in recent decades, so the musical interpreters have outnumbered the composers.[93] Another kind of interpreter, the academic historian, is strongly represented at the club, where Professor Jeremy Black, Professor Sir David Cannadine (president of the British Academy), Professor Sir Richard Evans, Professor Sir Michael Howard and Professor Sir Diarmaid MacCulloch are members. The associated worlds of museums and galleries figure prominently

in the photographic display, which includes Sir David Wilson, formerly director of the British Museum, Sir Alan Bowness, formerly director of the Henry Moore Foundation, and two former directors of the Victoria and Albert Museum, Alan Borg and Sir Roy Strong. Alongside the arts administrator, Lord Palumbo, are just three practitioners: the artist Bridget Riley, the furniture-maker John Makepeace, and the sculptor Philip Jackson.[94] Among other leading practitioners in the club is Lida Kindersley, the letter cutter.

Although Croker founded a non-partisan literary club in 1824, a hundred of its 'original members' were MPs. Today there are only three: Julian Lewis, Justine Greening (appointed Secretary of State for Education in 2016) and Rory Stewart. When Anthony Sampson reviewed the state of British politics, forty years after the publication of his *Anatomy of Britain* (1962), he commented on the fact that the quality of MPs had been 'widely seen to be declining'.[95] The cabinet, he argued, has been weakened, 'not just by the ambitions of prime ministers, but by the declining quality of their colleagues'.[96] Today, he concluded, 'it is one of the most serious flaws in the British democratic system: that the pool of talent to run the country has become too small to ensure effective government'. Whereas politics is now a separate profession, in the 1960s MPs regarded politics as only part of their activity and were proud of their amateur status.[97] Three of the politicians whose photographs hang upstairs – Enoch Powell, Roy Jenkins and James Callaghan – were of the last generation to regard a major speech in the House of Commons as a momentous rhetorical intervention, and to acknowledge the intellectual excellence of an opponent's speech. Theirs was also perhaps the last generation of MPs to feel at home at the club, where they were 'privileged to be admitted to an academy of letters', in the words of Lord Jenkins of Hillhead,[98] and where unlikely friendships made in the House between political antagonists could be fostered in the clubhouse, as in the case of Enoch Powell and Speaker George Thomas, both of whom were proposed by Patrick Cormack.[99] Margaret Thatcher considered herself to be too busy to take advantage of honorary membership and graciously declined the club's offer;[100] and only Geoffrey Howe among her senior cabinet colleagues was a member.

In a study on club affiliation among members of the House of Lords, published in 2012, Matthew Bond reported that the ten largest clubs, with the number of peers who are members in parenthesis, were the Garrick (49), Pratt's

(43), Beefsteak (41), Athenaeum (39), MCC (36), White's (31), Reform (27), Brooks's (27), Carlton (18), RAC (19), New (15), National Liberal (13), Farmers (12), Royal Commonwealth Society (10) and Oxford and Cambridge (10).[101] Five years later there were forty-four Athenian peers, most of whom were members before their elevation to the Lords. The Athenæum, a society of experts, has more members of what is now largely a House of experts than most other leading clubs. Former cabinet ministers can claim the right to enter the House of Lords. At the Athenæum, however, it is the peers' range of professional backgrounds that is striking: there are eight politicians, eight lawyers, six business people, four academics, three scientists, three medical practitioners, three clergy, three bankers, two diplomats, one police officer, one civil servant, one educationalist and one film producer. The seven Athenian members of the Order of Merit (out of twenty-three) also illustrate this wide professional range: HRH the Duke of Edinburgh, Lord Foster of Thameside, Lord Rees, Sir Magdi Yacoub, Lord Darzi, Lord Eames and Sir Michael Howard.

'For the first time in western democratic history', said George Walden, the former Conservative minister, in 2000, 'society is dominated by an elite of anti-elitists.'[102] In adapting to the age of postmodernity while maintaining a strong sense of its historic identity, the club has in a sense become countercultural, flourishing in a society which is suspicious of elites, unless they are of the sporting variety. The membership list, numbering about 2,000, is still impressive. A search of *Who's Who* and *Who Was Who* online by Malcolm Bishop reveals 4,308 entries on members who have died and 969 on living members, 62 of them female. As in earlier generations, most dome-headed Athenians are highly educated specialists whose expertise has some impact in the public domain. Clubbable, they tend to be introverts with social skills. Influential men and women, drawn from a wide range of professional fields, are still attracted to an institution which nurtures civilised conversation and companionship, traditional standards of dress code and etiquette, and access to a great library and high-quality cultural and social events. As Yehudi Menuhin wrote in a short millennial essay:

> The wonderful thing about the Athenæum is the setting it offers for productive leisure: the spaces between duties, the borderlines between people,

> where, perhaps, only antennae become aware of another presence: in silence or behind the protective shield of a book or a newspaper. Then, in conversation, cross-fertilisation occurs quite naturally as the blissful fulfilment of an effortless higher duty – to the future, to our fellow men, colleagues, society. Interest in and information about the most disparate subjects ensue. These are precious fruits which grow from a harmony of differences, a plurality of uniquenesses, if I may invent so unlikely, yet so democratic, a word.[103]

Plus ça change.