

# **The 1947 Club**

W Wallace  
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**The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors.**

**Northumberland and Durham Branch**

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**"The 1947 Club"**

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On two occasions I have given an after dinner talk to assembled Juniors and 1947 Club Members outlining the origins and aims of the Club, and on both occasions have been asked to put the talk into print for the benefit of current and future members of the 1947 Club. Hence, this is the broad history of the founding of the 1947 Club and its early years as a recognised part of the Northumberland and Durham Branch of the RICS.

W Wallace FRICS 2002.

As the very first formal meeting of the Club was held on 14th April 1955, an obvious query is why is it called "The 1947 Club" and not "The 1955 Club". With the passing of the years it is a difficult thing to recall with any great assurance, but my recollections will probably be adequate to cast some light upon it.

The War years (1939-1945) created great difficulties for professional bodies such as the RICS. Businesses were run by men beyond the age of conscription and a handful of younger men either not fit for military duty or exempt on grounds of working in a job of national importance. Furthermore, the men of the "1947" age group were brought up in an era when those in authority were treated with great respect, and usually addressed as "Sir". This included schoolteachers, senior partners and anyone else that was higher up the ladder! As a wartime measure, The General Council of the RICS had extended the age limit for JO membership to 40 and this lasted until about 1947 when the age limit was reduced year by year until it reached 33, the original age limit.

There is no doubt as to whose idea such a club was -Stuart Sisterson of Storey Sons and Parker. His aim was to create a Club that would be a bridge between the Junior Organisation on one side and

the Senior Branch on the other. Stuart, a frequent visitor to 12 Great George Street, was aware of the "1913 Club" - indeed he was a member, as he was our representative on the National JO Committee. The 1913 Club sought to perpetuate the contacts and friendships of the National JO Committee when the JO age limit prevented continued membership. The 1913 Club clearly has a similar background and objectives to our own club. It was founded to deal with almost identical problems arising from the disruption of professional lives by World War 1, and was an attempt to smooth the paths of men returning to civilian life after their shattering experiences of life in the trenches.

Informally, he passed the message amongst the Committee members of the Northumberland and Durham JO and gradually the idea of a similar, local, club was sown -finding favour from all sides. The first informal 'get-togethers' were usually in the Tiger pub (down an alley on the West Side of Pilgrim Street), or more often (when Whalley Hepple would suggest slinging a firkin of beer into the boot of his car), at the Newcastle Aero Club out on the Ponteland Road).

It was at these first meetings that 1947 was put forward as a good date, being a key time in moving from war-time to peace-time activities, and a year

that saw a major return to civilian life for a high proportion of conscripted service men.

The very first formal meeting of the 1947 Club was held on 14th April 1955 in the library of the Property Mart in old Eldon Square, Newcastle upon Tyne. This delightful building belonged to the Newcastle Branch of the Chartered Auctioneers and Estate Agents, and was made freely available to Chartered Surveyors and Chartered Land Agents for meetings of all sorts. These three associations eventually all merged into the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, and those who qualified - those who had served on the Committees of their Junior Organisations - were invited to join the 1947 Club.

It was a sombre building, with heavy solid wooden doors and limited natural light, containing a library of books, rarely consulted. The whole had an atmosphere of Edwardian sobriety and there is little wonder that, by 1957, the meetings were being held in the Eldon Grill!

But let us return to that first formal meeting. Those attending were:

**Basil Noble** (Sanderson Townend & Gilbert, Darlington) -he was quickly elected as the first Chairman of the '47 Club with myself, **Bill**

**Wallace**, as the first Secretary. The others, according to the minutes, were: **Jack Bernasoni** (Anderson & Garland); **Gradon Glen Davison** and **Colin Martindale**, both of Sanderson Townend and Gilbert (Newcastle); **Harold Gough** and **Norman Hogg**, both Quantity Surveyors; **Dennis Johnson** who, like myself was with the Inland Revenue Valuation Office; **Bryce Wearmouth**, a Quantity Surveyor; and, of course, **Stuart Sisterson** of Storey Sons & Parker.

Reference was made at that meeting to an informal meeting held in October 1954 when it had been suggested that the following should be the declared aims of the Club:

- i) The furtherance of the social and professional friendships formed in the JO Branch Committee.
- ii) Giving any help it could to the JO Branch.

The inaugural meeting of 1955 quickly approved and accepted these basic aims and the Secretary was instructed to prepare and send lists of potential members to all concerned.

Bryce Wearmouth proposed that the subscription should be 5 shillings per annum to cover cost of postage and a prize to be given to a member of the

Junior Branch. This was quickly seconded by Jack Bernasconi and unanimously approved by the meeting. Stuart Sisterson reported that in the exploratory talks of 1954, WM Balch, the Vice President of the RICS, had expressed a wish to be an honorary member of the "1947 Club". Stuart proposed that this wish should be fulfilled, and it was approved with acclamation.

Other matters accepted at this somewhat historic meeting included the rule that membership of the club was not to be automatic following departure from the JO Committee by age, but that such eligible former JO members should apply for 1947 Club membership. The 1947 Club would then consider the application.

It was also agreed that a "1947 Club Prize" would be awarded to the Junior Branch member who had put up the best performance at a Junior Branch meeting. Club members were to visit the meetings and recommend likely winners to the Club for a final decision. The first winner was JA Summers for his work toward the Junior Branch's future well being.

As the years passed by, however, it had to be conceded that it became increasingly difficult for Club members to maintain close contact with the Junior Branch, and more and more often the recipient of the prize was decided following advice

from the JO Branch Chairman and Honorary Secretary. An important factor in this was the increasing self reliance amongst the Juniors themselves, and their ability to produce a programme of events that equalled those of the Senior Branch. Financially too, the Juniors had wealth beyond the dreams of the early 1947 Club members -whose own experience when in the Junior Branch themselves was of existing on a very limited official grant.

In those early days, however, money matters were not so rosy as in more recent years, and this point is highlighted in the acquisition of the Junior Branch Chairman's Jewel. In 1958 the 1947 Club was informed by Bryce Wearmouth of the Junior Branch's efforts in raising £20 towards the cost of a Jewel, leaving a shortfall of ten guineas. Bryce suggested the 1947 Club should provide the balance, and this was agreed with a subscription of half a guinea (ten shillings and sixpence or 52½ pence!) being asked of every 1947 Club member.

By 1959 these subscriptions had raised seven pounds seventeen shillings and sixpence to which was added, from Club funds, two pounds twelve shillings and sixpence. This amount was donated to the JO Branch on 30th April 1959 enabling the purchase of the current Chairman's Jewel.



There were early discussions as whether or not the Club should organise a dance but it was agreed that this was better left with JO, and the Club should instead encourage all 1947 Club members to support any JO function. Although agreed with enthusiasm, in practice requests for tickets by 1947 Club members were very low indeed.

The following years showed the support the Club was getting from up and coming Surveyors of the area: -

- 1959 Bob Edmonds, Clem Clark
- 1962 Geoff Dickinson
- 1964 Len Humphries, Eric Jefferson & Bert Astley
- 1966 Ian Carmichael
- 1967 Brian Vail
- 1968 Ron Scott
- 1970 Brian Furniss
- 1974 Alan Johnson, Peter McKendrick & David Thomson
- 1975 Eric Wright
- 1976 Harry James
- 1977 Bob Robinson & Mike Westgarth-Taylor
- 1980 Peter Fall
- 1982 Joe Hyam
- 1983 Peter Miller
- 1987 Ken Scott
- 1990 John Cooke
- 1991 Andy Brewis & Brian Crumbley

I have, no doubt, omitted several very worthy members but the list above includes many of those Whose membership of the Club added considerably to the pleasure we all enjoyed whenever we met.

1983 saw the early signs of considerably more lady members into the profession, which was quite a cultural shock for some of the older members of the 1947 Club. We were, however, determined to welcome the new members if and when they applied for membership of the 1947 Club, and to that end Edward Watson was appointed "Women's liaison Officer" that very year.

This cannot be considered as one of our successes, as his report in 1984 said "I am feeling my way", and in 1985 he said, "I am groping in the dark". So it was not surprising when he was seen with a bad limp in 1986 and shortly afterwards he upped sticks and went on a prolonged visit to his Guru in Tibet. The position was never resurrected.

In 1989 Lesley Pringle was invited to become a member of the 1947 Club after her service on the JO Committee. This was a turn-about for our rule that potential members should themselves apply for membership, but the Chairman at that time, Bob Robinson, thought she might be a little shy in seeking membership of such a male orientated Club. I was given the task of explaining the aims of

the Club to her. Regretfully, I cannot remember carrying out this job but, whatever I said, it must have been powerful stuff for the first record of her attendance was not until May 1994. Lesley made a great effort to fulfil the rule about wearing the 1947 Club tie at meetings and, whilst not using it as a "neck-tie", she did manage to wear it in a feminine manner upon her torso!

Over the years attendance by members of the 1947 Club at meetings organised by the JO faded away, as did the prize. It seemed more practical to concentrate on the JO Committee, by inviting them to various sporting activities and -most popular of all- inviting them to dine with us.

I understand that the reading of extracts from the 47 Club minutes has become obligatory study in the Business Management course at the University, as the entries provide the best examples in Britain of excuses as to why no fixtures have been organised in the preceding year! In 1983, Joe Hyam volunteered to be Sports Secretary -several people swear they heard him and, in any event, the vocal approval ensured his appointment -although there is considerable doubt as to whether such a proposal was made and seconded in the normal way. He had been moved to take action, as our attempts to win in these activities were disappointing to say the least, as the following results from 1982 indicate: -

Cricket	-	Lost
Darts Quiz	-	Almost won
Indoor League	-	Third equal

Sport doesn't get much of a mention after this, but our record of arranging dinners is much more successful (No doubt a psychiatrist could explain!). The venues over the years have included the Aero Club, The County Hotel, The Red House, and The Constitutional Club and, most recently, the Northern Counties Club in Hood Street.

In 1993 preparations were put in hand for a dinner to celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that first formal meeting of April 1955. In April 2000, five years late, an excellent dinner with the JO Committee was held. This proved such a success, everyone said another should be organised. The year 2002 is our 47<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and following the great success of the 2000 Dinner, steps are being taken to organise a repeat performance which I am sure will be as successful as the 2000 occasion. After all, we are unlikely to attend the year 3000 celebrations -so all the more reason to enjoy year 2002.

In more recent years, a very popular event, arranged by Harry James, has been a wine tasting with refreshments at Rothbury -members being

transported by bus from Newcastle. This makes it a bit difficult for those living some distance from Newcastle, as driving doesn't seem to be an acceptable option with the current Licensing Laws! The 1947 Club minutes of 25th April 1968 refer to our dinner in The Board Room of The Red House, at a previous unspecified date during 1967/68, and comments that "spirits were dampened by the advent of the Breathalyser" that year. I don't think any of us would have passed the stringent drink limits of today, if taken after one of our successful dinners -but there were no accidents and everyone got home safe and sound.

There are only three recorded 'Votes of Thanks' for providing a round of drinks: -

- 1 Colin Martindale (1959)
- 2 Bill Wallace (1977)
- 3 Roger Harvey (1984)

'The Roger Harvey Round' as it was known, was looked upon in some way as accrued interest on a fine he incurred by forgetting to wear his tie in 1980! This was the year that a fine of £1 was agreed upon for failing to wear the Club Tie at club events

As a group, past Chairmen have not left a very great memory of their achievements. This is no

doubt due to the fact that, as often as not, they were elected to such high office in their absence -so that protestations that they are too busy getting married or have young children to look after, could not be heard in the noise of jubilation which usually accompanies the meeting's acceptance of a new Chairman! So, by and large, Chairmen are not the driving forces of the Club in its search for ways to help the Junior's in their professional careers.

There have been notable exceptions. For example, Harry James who, as mentioned earlier, was responsible for organising the wine tastings at Rothbury. He was about 14 years in waiting before he was elected Chairman in 1990 but was quickly re-elected in 1991 to ensure the continuance of his leadership.

This was the time, too, when complaints about the designs of the Club Tie led to a promise from the Chair that a new design would be investigated forthwith. The following year saw approval of the current tie and they first went on sale in 1993, when the Chairman was John Kelsey (who had been elected in his absence -having not been seen for some time!)

2001 saw only the third re-appointment of the Chairman since the first years of the Club (the others being Ian Carmichael (1970/1971) and Harry

James (1990/1991), when Brian Crumbley was nominated for a 'rollover'. Contrary to the successive terms by Harry James, this was due to the complete lack of a programme in his first year. This is, perhaps rather harsh on Brian as it is a regular feature for the 1947 Club 'Programme of Events' to consist solely of the AGM preceding the annual Branch JO Dinner; and it was he who organised the successful 2000 Dinner that took place only a few weeks before he was elected Chairman.

The only other elected officer of the Club is the Secretary, whose role is to maintain the spirit of the Club, who is responsible for its finances, and who keeps the Club generally informed of the activities of the current Junior Branch. There have been only four Secretaries throughout the life of the 1947 Club, and they are: -

Bill Wallace (1955 -1969)	-14 years
Frank Shepherd (1970-1975)	- 5 Years
Alan Johnson (1976-2000)	-25 years
John Cooke (2001 to date)	

Their writing styles are indicative of the characters themselves: -

**Bill Wallace:** Pedantic, Civil Service style. Lots of writing, with the main subject being buried beneath a mound of words, so that the question never gets asked.

**Frank Shepherd:** Precise, short, and totally uninformative.

**Alan Johnson:** Beautifully scripted, witty and highly imaginative. It is rumoured that the copyright of his minutes was sold to Punch (that went under), but never verified.

It is believed that Alan Johnson's, self inflicted, exceptional stint as Secretary was merely to prevent his election as Chairman. (I tried this tactic myself, but was, nonetheless, elected to the Chair in 1976).

There is one aspect of the 1947 Club on which I have said nothing, and that is the fact that the JO Branch have never forgotten, nor neglected, to invite the 1947 Club to the Annual JO Branch Dinner -an occasion that we have always found enjoyable.

A tradition has arisen at the Branch JO Dinner whereby the JO Chairman and the 1947 Club members attending, exchange mutual toasts to ratify the special bond between us and express the hope that the association will continue for many years to come.



What about the future? The aims of the 1947 Club were set out clearly earlier in this Pamphlet:-

- i) The furtherance of the social and professional friendships formed in the JO Branch Committee.
- ii) Giving any help it could to the JO Branch.

When the 1947 Club started, the organisation of the RICS was such that the Divisions existed merely within the overall umbrella of the Institution. Branch meetings covered all of the different Divisions, so General Practice members met Quantity Surveyors, Building Surveyors, and Mineral Surveyors etc. This interaction meant that all of the different disciplines were able to meet and enjoy an evening together, even though an individuals day to day job might be very different to that of the majority of Surveyors attending.

The re-organisation of the RICS some years ago made the individual Divisions much stronger and included the creation of a separate President for each of the Divisions. This re-organisation tended to separate us at ground level and the mutual feeling of belonging to a single Institution became harder to achieve. The saviour, to my mind, was the Junior Organisation where all of the different

Divisions were all catered for, and all that supported the JO were well aware of the differing disciplines within the local JO Branch.

There have been signs of difficulty in maintaining the interest of younger surveyors in the JO, highlighted by falling numbers at functions and lectures. It is to be hoped this will be a temporary downturn, and that these young men and women will soon see the benefits of strengthening the bonds between all types of surveyor. This will help them in their future careers, by creating friendships in the early days of their careers that may last all their working lives - and beyond. I know this to be true - it is 20 years since I retired as District Valuer, and I still enjoy the friendship, the support and the help of Chartered Surveyors of all Divisions. I would hope the same pleasure becomes available to those who are busy creating their own place in this complex world.

The RICS has now concluded a further programme of major re-organisation, to ensure its proper place as one of the major professional bodies in the country. I am sure that, throughout this immense change, the spirit of the 1947 Club will be there, following its aims as ever, to give what help and advice it can to Junior Members.