



# THE BRITISH UNITED SERVICES CLUB OF LOS ANGELES

## A History

prepared by

Doug Fordyce and Tom Barrett-Archdeacon

(ca. 1985)

In its fiftieth anniversary year the British United Services Club of Los Angeles remains as it has since it was formed, a club with a very special purpose. For many years before its formation in 1935 there had been a number of men from Britain and other Commonwealth countries who had settled in Southern California and who had served in war and peace in the Armed Services and Diplomatic Services of what was the British Empire. They felt a need to formalize the common bond they enjoyed of having served King and Country and to join with their friends who had served in the United States Armed Services and other allied nations by forming a club. Thus, on Tuesday, February 5th, 1935, an informal meeting of a small group of ex- servicemen was held at the home of Captain A. Cecil George, British Vice Consul, to consider the matter. The chairman of that meeting was Francis Edward Evans, His Britannic Majesty's Consul, and it was proposed that a club be formed and after some discussion Evans invited those present to a second meeting at his home on February 15th. It was at this meeting that a resolution to form a club and draw up a constitution and by-laws was made. On Friday, March 1st, 1935, at a dinner meeting held at the Masquer's Club in Hollywood, the new club came into being with the seventeen men present voting for a preamble and by-laws which, although modified with changing times, have remained essentially the same up to the present. The aims and purposes of the club were to promote social relations between those persons living in Southern California who served as officers in His Britannic Majesty's Armed, Diplomatic and Consular Services, or who held commissions in the Allied Navies or Armies and were attached for a part of their overseas service to British units; men who served with His Majesty's forces whom it was desirable to have as members and men of British birth resident in Southern California who by reason of their standing in the community were considered desirable as members. The preamble declared that in addition to promoting friendship among these groups of people as members of the Club, it was resolved to foster the friendship existing between the British Empire and the United States of America, in the hope that this friendship may be preserved for all time. From time to time the wording has been changed to reflect political changes as in substituting Commonwealth for Empire, adding categories of membership such as associate and honorary, and adapting to changed conditions to amend the by-laws. The name of the new Club was "The British United Services Club, 11 amended promptly by adding "of Los Angeles."

**Established 1935**



The first President was Major Claude King, a British actor and a member of the Masquer's Club, with Sir Francis Evans elected Honorary President, a position he held until 1940. Other members of that first committee were John O. Simpson, a former Canadian Army Captain, as Vice-President, Captain Eric Copeland as Honorary Secretary and Spencer T. Hankey as Honorary Treasurer. Hankey, who was also legal advisor to the British Consulate, arranged to incorporate and register the Club in California as a non-profit organization. He served as legal advisor to the Consulate and a member of BUSC until his death in 1960. The organization and by-laws of the Club were patterned after those of the British Officers' Club of New England and the British Officers' Club of Philadelphia whose by-laws were borrowed for this purpose and which laid down that the standard of conduct for the Club's monthly meetings and activities should adhere to those observed in the Officers' Messes of His Majesty's Forces. It may have been perhaps coincidental but Sir Francis Evans had been Vice-Consul in Boston 1926-1929 and 1932-1934 before arriving to take up his appointment as British Consul in Los Angeles in December 1934. Born in Canterbury, educated at Belfast Royal Academy and the London School of Economics, Sir Francis served in the Royal Irish Rifles in World War I. He joined the Consular Service in 1920 serving in New York, Boston and Panama as Vice-Consul then as Consul in Los Angeles. He was Consul-General in New York 1944-1950 and Assistant Under Secretary of State at the foreign office in 1951 before a difficult mission as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary in Israel 1952-1954. He was appointed Ambassador to Argentina in 1954 during the time of Peron and retired to Ulster in 1957, becoming Ulster Agent in London 1961-1966. Throughout his career and in retirement Sir Francis was always courteous, kindly and Considerate, and of utter integrity; the type of man who made Britain respected throughout the world and whose warmth of personality complemented his principles of loyalty and duty. He was a strong and active supporter of the B USC during his stay in Los Angeles and maintained a keen interest in Club affairs afterwards, even in retirement. Membership of the new club picked up quickly with men from the business community and a strong contingent from the British movie colony in Hollywood including Nigel Bruce, C. Aubrey Smith, Herbert Marshall, Alan Mowbray, Leslie Howard, and Reginald Owen. Others joined later such as Basil Rathbone, Ronald Coleman, Cecil Kellaway, Henry Stephens on, and Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. In addition to the regular dinner meetings each month, some of which were held at the Masquer's Club and some at other venues, there were special occasions such as the dinner held at the Ambassador Hotel on May 6th, 1935 to celebrate King George V's Jubilee and followed by a celebrity ball at which "all Hollywood showed up. " Later in June the Club began a tradition which it still maintains of entertaining visiting Commonwealth navy ships. On that occasion it was the light cruiser HMS Danae of the West Indies squadron commanded by Captain C. H. Knox- Little who, with his officers was entertained and dined by the B USC at Alan Mowbray's home with movie star members Ronald Colman, Herbert Marshall and others with their companions Merle Oberon and Gloria Swanson. The following year a similar event took place at the Midwick Club for Admiral Sir Matthew Best, K. C. B., D.S. O., M. V. D., C. -in-C. America and West Indies Station and officers of H. M. S. Apollo; and so it has continued throughout the years.

For many years the Club celebrated anniversaries which were observed in Britain and the Commonwealth such as Armistice Day, Empire Day, St. George's Day, but they were not always regular Club dinner meetings. Often, like the Club's first Armistice Day celebration, they were a dinner dance at a hotel as on November 11th, 1935 at the Ambassador Hotel when 800 people attended with BUSC members wearing military mess uniforms and medals, many film stars like Charles Chaplin, Leslie Howard, Sue O'Connor and C. Aubrey Smith, Senior U. S. Navy officers, consular representatives and



local V. I. P. s. An event described in contemporary press clippings as "a colorful and brilliant affair." In 1937 the Armistice Day Ball not only had an impressive list of sponsors, a Scottish pipe band, and a flag ceremony, but for entertainment had Ray Noble's orchestra and a floor show list of artists including Kenny Baker, Bing Crosby, Alice Fay, Gladys Swarthout and Tony Martin, the show being broadcast over NBC and the BBC.

During 1937 most of the regular monthly Club meetings were held at the Stock Exchange Club in downtown Los Angeles but since so many members lived close to Hollywood it was decided to try and find a permanent meeting place there. Major Claude King approached the Masquer's Club and through the good offices of another BUSC member, Alan Mowbray, they invited the BUSC to hold their monthly meetings there. With few exceptions the Club met there regularly until the end of 1982. The Masquer's Club, formerly an English style country house on North Sycamore Avenue in Hollywood was an actors' club and with its entrance hall, lounges, large paneled basement bar, beamed and paneled auditorium, stage and dining room had a unique ambience, well suited to the needs of the BUSC. Eventually the Masquer's Club fell on hard times, probably due to changes within the entertainment industry and poor management. At any rate, with changing conditions, it became impossible to continue BUSC meetings there and in 1982 the Club changed its meeting place to the Verdugo Club in Glendale. However, the mention of the name Masquer's conjures up a lot of memories and nostalgia for many members.

During the more than forty-five years that the BUSC held their dinner meetings at the Masquer's Club the walls echoed the words of distinguished soldiers, sailors, airmen, statesmen and others with their special qualifications to address a club with its military background, sometimes with a serious message, sometimes in a lighter vein. Their audience was special too, It had a camaraderie which came from a shared experience of service and duty and this gives the Club its continuing vitality and character. The monthly meetings are conducted in accordance with the traditions of a British military officers' mess which calls for members to wear dinner jackets with black tie or regimental or service mess uniform with medals and decorations; to pass the port for the drinking of the Loyal Toasts in a clockwise direction and to refrain from smoking until after dinner and the Loyal Toasts have been drunk. Traditionally the President proposes the first toast to "The President of the United States" and then calls on Mr. Vice (President) who proposes "Gentlemen, the Queen (or King)" which toast is then taken up by the members followed by an enthusiastic "God Bless Her."

For many years the Club enjoyed entertainment by many of Hollywood's greatest names and many lesser known but very talented performers, quite often following a speaker on a serious subject. This entertainment was arranged by members like Alan Mowbray, Leroy Prinz and others through their associates and contacts in the film and entertainment industry. Combined with a convivial social time afterwards in the ante-room (the downstairs bar at the Masquer's) this must have made for some long evenings. The social side of the meetings has at times been over emphasized but to balance it there have always been people like Sir C. Aubrey Smith who in 1942 wrote to the Committee and chided the membership about Club policy, asking that there be more speakers on serious subjects. Sir Aubrey was a member from early days in 1935 and became Honorary President in 1941, a position he held until he died in 1948 at the age of eight-five. A staunch supporter of the Club and recruiter of members he presented a special BUSC scroll to H. M. George VI in 1947 and did much to promote the aims and objectives of the Club wherever he went. Standing six feet, three inches tall, ramrod straight in his mid-eighties, with craggy brows, imposing nose and resonant voice he projected the picture image of what in



fact he was, a representative of "the Empire" at its highest and best. At his funeral service his eulogy was written by James Hilton and read by Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., both fellow BUSC members.

On many occasions the BUSC has been called upon to take charge of or assist in special activities involving Commonwealth Representatives. Notable among these have been the memorial service to King George V, receptions for distinguished visitors like Lord Halifax, British Ambassador to the U.S. , Lord and Lady Harlech, Sir Harold and Lady Caccia and various other notable persons. Several Investitures were held at BUSC meetings at the Masquer's Club notably in 1942, 1946, 1948, and 1949 at which medals and awards both civil and military were presented to local recipients by the incumbent British Consul General assisted by Club members Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., Herbert Marshall and William J. Cowen. It was on one such occasion that Frank Capra and B USC member Captain Milnor Gleaves were decorated. In 1952 a special presentation was made to Bob Hope for his services to the Armed Forces of the British Commonwealth. He went on the programme earlier than had been arranged and after twenty minutes of typical Hope humor and fun, Club President James Loudon, a sincere, methodical Scot, referred to his previously written notes and solemnly announced "and now we will have the entertainment. "Recalling the incident in 1965 he said "Well, you can imagine the reaction. The audience howled for five minutes and all I could do was stand there and take it."

The Club has always been mindful of its obligations and during World War II raised money and sponsored entertainment for servicemen and merchant mariners. There was even a Ladies War Relief division of the BUSC for fund raising. Of course a number of members returned to Britain to join or rejoin their Service and came back to California after the war with additional awards and decorations like Norman A. Glover, a member from 1935, who left as a Captain with an M. C. and returned as a Squadron Leader with a bar to his M. C. Club meetings continued throughout the War and the main emphasis was helping with seamen's hospitality both with money and entertainment. The Rev. P. B. "Tubby" Clayton, the founder of Toe H, a figure well known in Britain and to British servicemen, addressed the Club on his work and his appeal for material for sailors at sea met with great success. The Club donated time and money to Hospitality House in San Pedro, the British Shipping Hospitality Fund, the Combined British Charities and continued to support the Last Post Fund as it had for several years. Also support was given to the famous Hollywood Guild and Canteen on Hollywood Boulevard. In 1942 members agreed, as a concession to wartime conditions, to suspend the requirement of wearing dinner jackets at meetings for the duration. In fact, the Committee decided to make it optional. Entertainment at the meetings continued, however, and the beloved Gracie Fields visited the Club and sang on two occasions. A combination of determination to keep up his attendance record and juggling duties on coastal patrol enabled member Lt. Cyril Cooke to maintain a perfect attendance record throughout the war.

Towards the end of 1944, Lt. Col. Robert A. McMillan, M. C., an American member, suggested that the BUSC consider establishing a permanent trophy to be awarded annually to the best drilled company in the Los Angeles High School District Junior R. O. T. C. It was prompted by the wartime alliance between Britain, the Commonwealth and the United States and the Club's declaration that this friendship should be preserved for all time. The suggestion was adopted at the annual general meeting in January 1945 and enthusiastically received by the L. A. High School Junior R. O. T. C. The first presentation of the shield was made on May 29th, 1945 to Van Nuys High School by Sir C. Aubrey Smith, Honorary President of BUSC. The words used by Cyril Cooke, the Club President, to describe the award and to introduce Sir



Aubrey to those assembled, summed up the purpose of BUSC most fittingly. Since then this Trophy has become one of the most coveted awards in the L. A. High School system, and it has become traditional to invite the senior cadets of the winning R. O. T. C. teams to a BUSC dinner meeting. Club members have put in many hours in organizing these competitions and award ceremonies and many distinguished soldiers, sailors and airmen have participated in their success like Col. Iain Gold-Stone, D.S.O. , M. C., Col. John Morgan, C. M. H., not to mention the organizing work of Eric Copeland, Ernest Bowman, John Davies, Alastair Macdonald and Ken Asten to name just a few.

The BUSC has not always followed the same format for its meetings which it observes today. For many years they were held on different days of the month, depending on the convenience of the officers and/or speakers. After World War II attempts were made to hold them on the same day of each month but it was not until 1956 that the third Friday was settled upon (except for Ladies Night, the Annual Ball and the Annual General meeting), and this has remained the Club's meeting night since then. Along the way other bits of Club protocol and tradition have been added such as the closing benediction: "And now, gentlemen, we will retire to the ante- room whence may God guide your weary footsteps safely home, 11 which, according to Ernest Bowman (President 1952) was introduced by Alan Mowbray (President 1938/39 /40). It was Lawrence Priesack (President 1959 and 1976) who first regularly proposed in the BUSC: "Gentlemen, pray charge your glasses and be upstanding for the Loyal Toasts." In addition to the present array of club ties, car badges, blazer badges and tie tacks, there have been from time to time Club playing cards, Christmas cards, cuff links and other items all decorated with the Club crest which was originally designed by Sir Francis Evans. A handsome plaque indicating the life membership given to him by the Club in 1939 and decorated with the crest occupied a prominent position in his dining room until his death in 1983.

The dedication of some meeting nights has also changed from Empire Day, Armistice Day, St. George's Day to meetings dedicated to branches of the Armed Forces such as Army Night, Battle of Britain-R. A. F. Night, although a dinner meeting dedicated to the Battle of Trafalgar and the Royal Navy has been held since 1939. Not surprisingly the Battle of Trafalgar has been won many times at BUSC meetings with our own members giving the most interesting and colorful accounts and he is the poorer in experience who never heard James Warner Bellah or George Ashton relate Nelson's victory. The designation of other meetings has also changed considerably with the growth of the Club, as for example, the President's Dinner which was for many years held in December with Ladies' Night in September. The December meeting became the Christmas meeting in 1943 with a later transition to Fathers' and Sons' Night and still later to the mildly controversial Fathers', Sons 1 and Daughters 1 Night. The Christmas meeting, since participation by members' children, has produced its own traditions including a reading of "'Twas the Night Before Christmas," a magician's performance and, of course, Christmas caroling. Some traditions like Cameron Grant's saga of the "heroic efforts of Colonel Farthingale" unfortunately died with him.

It was not only the format and dedications which changed over the years, but the meetings themselves. Speakers have always been important in Club meetings and 1959 was no different in that respect from previous years. Guest speakers that year included the Commander of the Pacific Missile Range, Rear Admiral Jack Monroe, the Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force Pacific, Major General Samuel Jack USMC, and Romain Gary, Consul General of France, and many others. However in July, in response to members' requests, there was no entertainment at that meeting or at other meetings later that year.



The Club bulletin said "It is hoped that this will provide more of an opportunity for the older members to become acquainted with the newer members and to partake of the good-fellowship which has always been such an important element in the activities of our Club. " Although entertainment by singers, small musical groups and other artists continued for the next few years, it was on a smaller scale and less frequently than in earlier years and eventually ceased altogether. Members still "repaired to the ante-room" (the downstairs bar at the Masquer's) for songs around the piano with accompaniment provided by themselves and to exchange stories and tall tales.

A look at the records and membership roster of the BUSC over its first fifty years show that individual members have served in all of the various branches of the armed forces of the Commonwealth and the United States. A list of those regiments and units conjures up a colorful display of some of the most famous and honored names in military history. When the Club was formed there were men who had served not only in the Great War but in previous campaigns in the far reaches of the Empire, in the Boer War, the North West Frontier, in Africa and elsewhere. Many of the British and Commonwealth regiments no longer exist but their names remind us of the strong loyalties which existed and which still exist for those regiments which survive today, in infantry and cavalry regiments with local associations and family traditions. It is impossible to give the names of all the regiments in which members have served but a sampling of some of them follows: Capt. Matthew Blood Smyth, Royal Irish Rifles; Nigel Bruce, Honorable Artillery Co.; Capt. Aubrey Bullock- Webster, 2nd Royal Bengal Lancers; Capt. W. J. Cowan, Fort Garry Horse; Capt. R. A. Duckworth-Ford, Nigeria Regt.; Capt. A. C. George, 7th Hariana Lancers; Major Sam Harris, Australian Light Horse; Major G. W. P. Money and Col. Iain Gold-Stone, 3rd Queen Alexandra's Own Gurkha Rifles; Lt. Col. J. H. Mingail, 8th Gurkha Rifles; Lt. Col. C. D. MacPherson, 12th Manitoba Dragoons; Col. Lawrence Priesack, Artist's Rifles - Ceylon Mounted Rifles - Black Watch (42nd Royal Highland Regiment); John G. Ridland, Royal Scots - Nagpur Volunteer Rifles; Capt. L. S. Rowberry, Royal Scots Greys; Thomas DeVoy, New Zealand Field Artillery; Lt. W. Kelly, Durham Light Infantry; John A. Kendall, The Buffs and South Wales Borderers; Lt. Waltel'I Aiton, King's African Rifles and The Cameroonians; Lt. Col. Frank Hodsoll, Imperial Yeomanry and Westminster Dragoons; Lt. Tudor Williams, King's Shropshire Light Infantry; Capt. John Kohn, Wiltshire Regt.; Fred Cooper, Lord Strathcona's Horse; Capt. Lawrence Read, King's Royal Rifle Corps; Brig. Genl. George Campbell, Highland Light Infantry. Many other members served in the Royal Engineers, Royal Artillery, Royal Corps of Signals, Royal Army Service Corps, Royal Army Ordnance Corps, Intelligence Corps, etc. Many others have served in the Royal Navy, Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, Royal Marines and of course the Royal Flying Corps, Royal Air Force, Fleet Air Arm with their fellows from Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. The Club's American members have also served in all branches of the United States Armed Services; the United States Army, the Army of the United States, the U.S. Army Air Force, the U.S. Air Force, the U.S. Navy, the U.S. Marine Corps.

Medals for valor were awarded to many members during their active service, including the Congressional Medal of Honor to Col. John C. Morgan and the D.S. O. and Bar and M. C. to Col. Iain Gold-Stone among many others, all of whom seem to have a modest reluctance to talk about the occasion for the award. Other members have received Civil decorations for work and achievements for their Government and/or Sovereign.

Membership in the BUSC has always been by invitation only and its by-laws and rules of etiquette although modified by external events and the need to reflect changing times have remained essentially



the same since its founding. This has been one of the Club's strengths and a source of the loyalty of members and it is so because members have scrutinized proposed changes of rules to be sure that those things which make the Club unique and set it apart from other organizations are kept intact and not whittled away in the name of progress or in an attempt to keep up with some newly found freedom. It is certain that with continuing fine leadership the BUSC will continue to provide its own special combination of military camaraderie, a forum for appropriate speakers, enjoyable social events and the opportunity to promote and enjoy those close British Commonwealth and American relationships for which the Club was formed fifty years ago.