



 **THE RAG**  
ARMY & NAVY CLUB

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**ISSUE 69 - July 2025**



# ARMY AND NAVY CLUB UPDATES

## Update From The Chairman



As we enter the Summer months the Club continues to be busy and welcoming. The Waterloo Dinner was a great success and Lord Roberts' stimulating presentation on Napoleon's Marshals was fascinating. Those attending were also able to take home a copy of his book for further study! As reported to the recent Club AGM, we will be using the quieter holiday period to undertake some major refurbishment and improvement to event rooms. Please bear with the team while this work is in process.

The AGM was well attended and I include as a summary some points of note.

In my address I referred to standards of dress and behaviour at The Rag. In a Club like ours, with a proud Military and Naval tradition, this really should not be an issue but, regrettably, there have been a number of recent instances where individuals and groups have fallen short of these standards. The Clubhouse is our home, just as a Mess or Wardroom is for those still serving. Relaxed hospitality and efficiency are a good guide, but respect for others is a basic courtesy and essential to preserving our Club ethos. Please ensure your guests are aware of these expected standards. In particular, The Ribbon Bar is a relaxed and safe haven. A small minority, whose behaviour has been unacceptable, risk undermining that quiet enjoyment. The Board and Senior Staff will be working to ensure our reasonable standards are upheld. Our dress code is sensible for 2025 - more flexible than some comparable clubs - but should not be stretched beyond what is appropriate. In discussions with members following the AGM it became clear to me and other Board members that there is considerable confusion over what our Club Dress Code actually is? As a matter of urgency therefore we will be reviewing precisely how to best communicate these guidelines, which in reality have not changed for the past two years! It was also clear that there is an overwhelming sense from members attending the AGM that standards of behaviour are in many ways more important than simple adherence to any dress code.

On a happier note, we welcomed three new Directors to the RAG Board, consistent with the requirement to elect two military and one non-military member. They are Captain. David Gibbs, a former Irish Guards Officer, Captain Mike Hawthorne and Alan Haig, who has served as a co-opted member of the Finance & Audit Committee for the past 3 years and will now take the Chair following John Theophilus's retirement. At the Board meeting following the AGM we invited Captain Mike Hawthorne (Rtd) OBE to become Club Vice Chairman and also co-opted Lieutenant Commander Bryce O'Hara, a serving Officer in RAN, to the Board. I very much look forward to working with all four.

I should also particularly like to thank John Theophilus and Stewart James for their long and effective service on the Board. We will miss their contributions but still look forward to seeing them regularly in the Club.

I briefly mentioned the two Charitable Trust Funds which exist and can be tax effectively used for donations or bequests. The Benevolent Fund is established to provide financial assistance to longer serving staff who may be facing difficulties. It is managed by a group of Trustees who monitor and control grants. The Rag Art Conservation Trust has been established to care for our large collection of art and chattels. This is an important task which requires the support of all members. May I encourage you to consider supporting both Trusts in whatever way you think appropriate.

On behalf of all members, I thanked our Staff for their continued friendly and efficient service. Without them, the Club would have a very different culture.

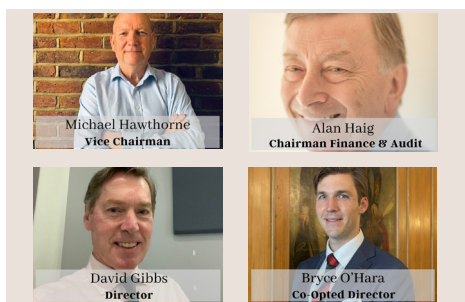
So please join me, when you have the opportunity to thank them in person. We are indeed fortunate to have such an effective and well managed team, both front-of-house seen, and unseen.

Other Military Matters - Over recent weeks I have received input from a number of members who have requested that the Club should make our wider membership aware of the Northern Ireland Legacy Petition which is currently accessible, should you wish to do so, using this link. **Click here.**

Finally I was delighted to be able to congratulate two long standing RAG Members - Lord David Richards and Lord Nick Houghton - on behalf of the entire Club, for their appointment by His Majesty to the rank of Field Marshal on June 14th.

The AGM formally concluded at 12:35 but discussions continued over refreshments in the Drawing Room.

*Neil Johnson, Chairman*



# ARMY AND NAVY CLUB UPDATES

## Membership Update



Following on from the Chairman, I too wanted to summarise the key membership points covered from the AGM:

After a very positive retention rate for 2024 and despite the number of new applicants so far, net growth has slowed. Sadly, this is largely due to the unfortunate accelerated death rate in 2025, with 61 member deaths (ytd), against 17 this time last year. While the majority were on our honorary 50+ years of service

membership, it is proving challenging to counter the increased mid-year 'leavers'.

I also thanked and recognised members for continuing to be our best recruitment tool, helping ensure we protect and grow the special environment and ethos we are lucky to enjoy. Last year we saw a large increase in applicants referred and have already received 14 more referrals than this time last year. I look forward to writing to those members at the end of the year to thank them for their efforts. As a reminder, to ensure you receive your recognition in January, please contact the membership team with the name of the applicant you wish to refer, they will of course happily share the relevant joining information.

Realising the importance of protecting our Army & Navy connections, we

continue to foster strong relationships with the various associations such as Britannia Association, ARNO, The Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and larger Army Corps. More recently, we were honoured to form a new relationship with the FAAOA, which we hope will be a source of new Fleet Air Arm members. As the Naval Club renewal draws ever closer, I briefed the AGM on the ongoing work to encourage as many members to renew as possible. Based on the usage data we have, we expect only 100 to 200 will renew from September 2026. We will continue to provide all the necessary information to Naval Club members leading up to their renewal and invite them to contact the membership team if they have any questions.

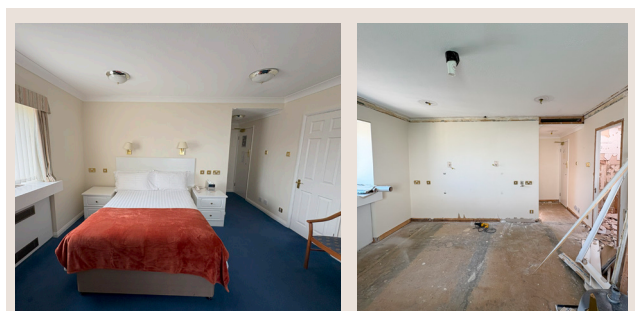
*Mark Spragg, Membership Chairman*

## Upcoming Club Improvements

A number of changes are underway! Over the next six weeks, several improvement projects will be taking place throughout The Club.

### Bedroom Refurbishment – Pilot Rooms in Progress

Work is underway on two pilot bedrooms—one on the fifth floor and one on the seventh. These rooms feature newly designed bathrooms and one of the interior schemes previewed at the AGM 2024. They'll help us explore practical details and gather feedback before moving forward with a wider rollout. Some noise is expected during this phase, and we really appreciate your patience.



### Pall Mall Room – A Thoughtful Refresh

Another focus is the Pall Mall Room, one of the Club's most frequently used spaces. Often regarded as our "state room," it will undergo a refresh this August. While it may not feel long since its last update, the décor and carpet have noticeably aged. The new design will highlight the three distinguished paintings that define the room's character.



### Additional Business Pods

In response to the 2024 member surveys and increasing demand for private business space, three soundproof business pods will be installed in the James Cook Library this Summer. This addition will help ease pressure on the Business Centre and provide a more flexible working environment for both existing and prospective members.





# ADVENTURE CIRCLE

## Camel Trek in Jordan

In mid-May, eleven pioneers of The Rag Adventure Circle, led by Duncan Schofield, travelled to Jordan all ready to face the challenge of a 55km camel trek through the desert. The team, aged from twenty seven to eighty eight, travelled from Canada (via Rome), Geneva, Saudi Arabia and Ireland, as well as the UK, to enjoy this amazing opportunity.



When the camels arrived, we were date matched with our mounts. Ian Annett immediately formed a love bond with Sheilan, Andy MacDonald described Zoba as having a 'relaxed attitude and short legs', whilst Jon Perkins' initial introduction to Asalan was much less smooth. For the first couple of hours riding, the camels were tethered into a train before we were deemed competent to control our own individual mounts.

Over the first day we trekked to Wadi Nugria, stopping en route for a few hours to avoid the heat of the day. Each night we rough camped under the stars, using sleeping bags and camel blankets as mats. In the evening we climbed a few hundred feet up the rocks to an incredible viewpoint to watch the sunset. Our trek cook, Hussein Eid, produced Arabian tea and coffee followed by chicken and rice. After dinner, some sat by the camp fire chatting, others retired to their sleeping bags exhausted.



By the second day, we moved west into the wider desert. Camels showed their true nature: Asalan tried to bite Jon; Ollie's camel Fufu established himself as leader; Belinda Lehtre's camel bent her phone; Sarah Galbraith's Alien tried to roll on her. On the second evening, we were joined by Ali's sons, Faisal and Talal. Faisal took on the lead of the train and proved a highly competent camel master.

By the third day aches, pains, abrasions, blisters and bleeding from unspeakable places were starting to tell. Still, the team pressed on with determination, only stopping briefly to explore a pre-Nabatean cave. The final night was celebrated with Mansaf - a national dish of Jordan.

The expedition was an amazing experience thoroughly enjoyed by all. Huge thanks to Duncan Schofield and Ali Eid. If you have an idea for an adventure, speak to Duncan and the Club team - your dream could become reality.

Members can read the full article by [clicking here](#).

## The Rag Chess Circle



Chess at The Rag has experienced a quiet revival, driven by the dedication of team captain Mike Ross. Through personal outreach, Club promotion, and relationship-building across London's chess scene, Mike has attracted 17 new Chess members - including former members of other private clubs - to a warm, hospitable chess environment at The Rag. His efforts have helped

transform the Club into a respected competitor among prestigious institutions, with regular matches and participation in the Hamilton-Russell Friendlies League. Alongside formal play, The Rag also hosts a popular monthly Social Chess Group, fostering community and connection. All players - new, returning, or experienced - are warmly invited to join. **Click here to read.**



# Club News

## Meet Robert Lyall – Elevating the Coffee Room Experience



Robert brings experience from some of London's top 5-star hotels, including the Jumeirah Carlton Tower, The Landmark, and

The Rubens at the Palace. He also helped launch The Great Eastern Hotel and One Whitehall Place. His passion for training and mentoring continues at the Army & Navy Club, where he now enjoys a healthier work/life balance.

Since joining The Rag, Robert has implemented several impactful changes.

He has introduced thoughtful service touches to improve members' culinary experience. A triplicate ordering system now ensures accuracy and keeps the team aware of each table's progress. He has also standardised the sequence of service, helping to deliver a consistent experience for members, and increased wine decanting for a refined touch.

Robert's commitment to professional development shows in his multi-skilling approach, with Coffee Room staff and others trained to work across departments, enhancing service throughout F&B. He's equally proud of his team: Aga, the energetic and knowledgeable Restaurant

Supervisor from the Mandarin Oriental, and Sitti, a long-standing member with deep insight into members' preferences. A cherished part of the Coffee Room is the ever evolving Fuller Wine List, introduced in memory of Commander Malcolm Fuller, offers members fine wines at excellent value, curated by a passionate Wine Advisory Committee.

Looking ahead to the Summer period, a reminder that the Smoking Bar will follow its usual closure from 28th July until 1st September. The Coffee Room will stay open throughout the Summer, except for one week from 25th August for kitchen maintenance.

Executive Chef Hart has refreshed the A La Carte menu with vibrant, seasonal flavours from local producers. Highlights include Pan-Seared Wild Bass with Samphire, Asparagus and Brown Shrimp Butter, and for meat lovers, Rack of Herdwick Lamb with Lyonnaise Rosti, Pea & Mint Mousse, Heritage Carrots, and Lemon Thyme Jus. He also values the classics, keeping dishes like Loch Var Smoked Salmon, Morecambe Bay Potted Shrimps, and the 6oz Chargrilled Scottish Fillet Steak with Peppercorn Sauce.



## Summer Promotion

This Summer, members and their guests are warmly invited to enjoy weekend rates every day on stays of two or more consecutive nights between 21st July and 7th September 2025. Whether for a leisurely escape or a return to familiar tradition, make the Club your home in London – with exceptional value offered throughout the week.

Set on prestigious Pall Mall, the Club provides a serene and comfortable base in the heart of St. James's. From here, London's most iconic parks, landmarks and cultural institutions are just a short stroll away. You can make a reservation by contacting the Front Desk at: [reception@therag.co.uk](mailto:reception@therag.co.uk).

As part of your stay, enjoy a host of seasonal additions:



### Summer Picnic Hampers in St. James's Square Gardens

Enjoy a piece of The Rag in the elegant surroundings of St James's Square Gardens – just moments from the Club. Thanks to Chef Hart, picnic hampers are available by advance reservation and pre-payment.

### Discover London's Parks from the Heart of the City



Take a gentle stroll to Buckingham Palace or enjoy the calm, leafy paths of St. James's Park. With Green Park and Hyde Park also within easy reach, the Club offers an ideal base from which to explore London's finest green spaces.

### Dining & Delight at The Ribbon Bar



For a more relaxed occasion, members may enjoy generous sharing boards and a selection of wines on the Club Terrace. Alternatively, the day may be brought to a close with a fine cigar and pleasant company, which is always warmly welcomed.



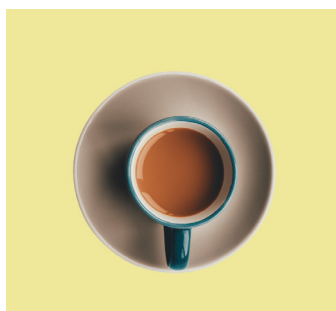
# CLUB MEMBER EVENTS

Discover this season's exciting events and services



**BONNY LUNCH WITH  
DR PETER SHIPLEY**

**4TH SEPTEMBER**



**COFFEE +  
CONNECT**

**11TH SEPTEMBER**



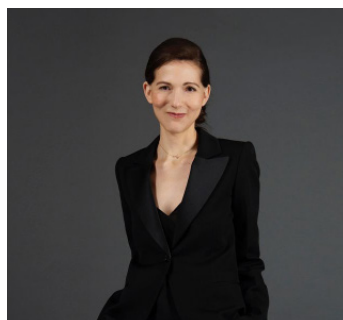
**SUMMER DRINKS  
RECEPTION**

**12TH SEPTEMBER**



**TASTING ON THE  
TERRACE**

**16TH SEPTEMBER**



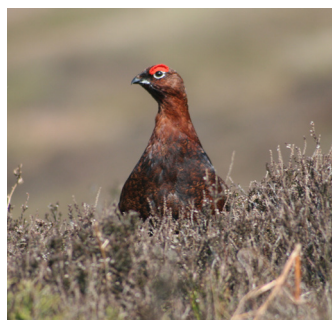
**FIRESIDE CHAT WITH  
JANE MARGUERITE  
TIPPETT**

**22ND SEPTEMBER**



**LUNCH WITH  
LORD KINNOCK**

**24TH SEPTEMBER**



**GROUSE  
DINNER**

**26TH SEPTEMBER**



**TRAFALGAR DINNER  
WITH GENERAL SIR  
GORDON MESSENGER**

**17TH OCTOBER**

## Conservation News - Wellington Portrait by Pickersgill

This Summer, while the Club is enjoying some downtime, a team of art restorers will be hard at work on a painting of its first patron: Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington.

Portrait of the 1st Duke of Wellington on Copenhagen (c.1845) by Henry William Pickersgill RA was purchased by subscription for £500 in 1852, the year the Duke died.

Pickersgill (1782–1875) was a sought-after portraitist whose sitters included figures such as Sir Robert Peel, William Wordsworth and Michael Faraday. Originally,

the painting would have been displayed in the old clubhouse, with its high ceilings and grand staircases—more fitting surroundings for such a large work. Today, the unframed canvas rests on the only wall that can accommodate it, in a second-floor corridor, directly on the carpet. It is in poor condition and urgently needs cleaning and consolidation to prevent further damage. It will also receive a new frame—the first in over 60 years—restoring both structure and dignity.

Though costly, conservation is vital to preserving the Club's distinctive art collection for future generations.



The Rag is more than a Club — it is a living record of culture, history, and its members. Its art collection reflects past generations and enduring values. Many works now need expert care to last for future members. The Art Conservation Fund supports their preservation through professional cleaning, repair, and preventive care. Every donation helps protect the collection that makes our Club unique. Please consider donating by [clicking here](#) and becoming a steward of our shared heritage.