



# THE RAG

ARMY & NAVY CLUB



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ISSUE 70 - November 2025

# Army & Navy Club Updates

## Update from the Chairman



It is wonderful to see the Club so busy and vibrant post-summer. The hugely successful refurbishment of the Pall Mall Room

has been much appreciated. If you've not yet seen it do look in. The Drawing Room will follow, along the same lines, in due course. Two sample bedrooms have also been completed, with both Army and Navy themes, and have been well received. If you would like to view them, when available, do ask Tim in Membership to make arrangements.

Another impressive innovation is the installation of three 'Pods' for private telephone or face-to-face conversations in what used to be the Cooke Room. In deference to our submariner members, and since Dolphins swim in 'Pods' we thought it appropriate to rename that space The Dolphin Room. Appropriate signage will be attached and a booking and access system ini-

tiated. Individual pods will be named after famous submariners, rather than boringly 1,2,3?

I am pleased to report that, generally, standards of dress around the Club appear to have improved since the AGM and subsequent communications. May I just remind members that it is their responsibility to brief their guests on what is expected. I was lunching in the Coffee Room recently when a guest was clearly embarrassed because he was not wearing anything remotely related to a tailored jacket. The staff were magnificent and a loan jacket was offered and enthusiastically accepted. But the clear problem was that the member had not briefed his guest. This is just bad manners.

Club events continue to thrive and many members have commented favourably on the quality and frequency of events. Our thanks to the Membership and Events team for all their hard work in creating and managing these events and thanks also to you for your support. The Annual Trafalgar Dinner was a great success on October 17th. Club Senior Trustee, Admiral Jon

Westbrook presided and our Guest Speaker was General Sir Gordon Messenger KCB, DSO\*, OBE. Former VCDS, a Royal Marine, currently Constable of HM Tower of London and, appropriately, Rear-Admiral of the United Kingdom!

Recruitment continues to be a priority. Do please bring your guests, both military and non-military, to the RAG and introduce them to all it has to offer. If appropriate, encourage them to apply for membership. Tim and the Membership team will be pleased to assist. Finally, since this will be the last practical opportunity before Christmas to do so, may I on behalf of all members thank our wonderful staff, seen and unseen, for their continued and dedicated service. Without their cheerful efficiency, the RAG would be a very different place. Please see on page 4 my brief summary of this year's Chairman's Christmas Fund, and do please contribute generously.

*Neil Johnson,  
Chairman*

## Update from the General Manager



As we move into the final months of 2025, the Club is full of energy and anticipation for the festive season ahead. The past few months have

been some of our busiest and most rewarding, and I would like to take a moment to recognise the continued dedication of our entire team, their professionalism, warmth, and commitment to ensure the Army & Navy Club remains a place our members are proud to call their own.

Within the Food & Beverage department, I am delighted to announce the promotion of Robert Lyall to Food & Beverage Manager. Robert brings

over twenty years of five-star hospitality experience from leading London hotels, including Jumeirah Carlton Tower, The Rubens at the Palace, and The Landmark, and his leadership will help us continue to strengthen our standards across all dining areas.

We have also made important strides in improving safety across the Club. The garage is being upgraded with a new member-card operated door to enhance security. Please make sure you have your Rag Card with you if you are using the garage.

Members may have recently received an email about the Club's wish to acquire a new piano, and I would like to thank those who have already shown their support for this thoughtful initiative, which will bring renewed warmth and atmosphere to our social spaces.

Looking ahead, there is much to look forward to. Our always-popular St Émilion Dinner returns on 21st November, followed by the Tri-Club Christmas Carol Concert at St James's Church, one of the most cherished events of the year. The new year will begin with Burns Night on 23rd January, an evening of great food, whisky, and lively company, followed by a special event on 27th February marking the 35th Anniversary of the Gulf War, the first time the Club will formally commemorate this significant milestone.

I look forward to seeing many of you around the Club in the coming weeks as we celebrate this special time of year together.

*Pedro Mendes,  
General Manager*

# Membership Committee Updates

## Update from the Membership Chairman



In the last newsletter, I referred to the overall optimism felt as we moved into 2025. I believe that feeling is still justified even though the economic and political conditions are, if anything, even more uncertain. The fundamental objective for the Membership Team is recruitment and retention and this remains our primary focus. The team, led by Tim Smart, consisting of Rose Collins (Membership and Member Events Assistant) and Luke Macpherson (Marketing Coordinator) is now fully staffed and well balanced to meet the challenges we will face in 2026.

### Recruitment and Retention

To date, over 200 new members have joined the Club compared with 182 at this time last year. One reason for this may be due to increased membership interest from our Associate Clubs such as the Britannia Association, ARNO and the Fleet Air Arm Officers Association, who we are honoured to be associated with. The Membership Committee are very busy targeting military recruitment both serving and retired, which includes strengthening our ties with Royal Academy Sandhurst Alumni through their own Association. There is no

joining fee for either military and non-military applicants under the age of 29, and former members can enjoy a 50% discounted fee to rejoin.

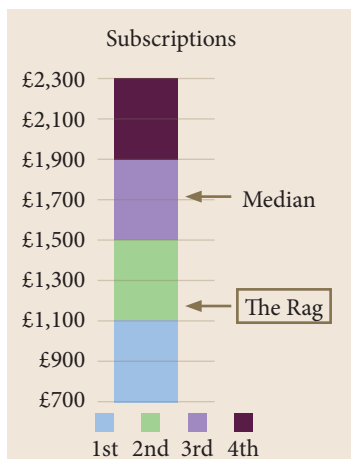
Existing Club members are the best recruiters and our 'Refer a Friend' scheme launched in 2021 continues to be successful with an increase of 23 referrals compared to this time last year. To refer a friend, simply email [membership@therag.co.uk](mailto:membership@therag.co.uk) to discuss this further. We are also actively looking to increase the numbers of overseas members.

In terms of leavers and resignations, the economic situation will, of course, have an impact on retention. In addition, during 2025 the death rate amongst members has been particularly high. To date, the figure stands at 85 compared with 41 at the same time last year. This is a great loss, especially as many of those who have died this year were amongst our longest serving members, with 50 plus years of service with the Club, contributing so much to our esteemed membership.

We are very mindful of the feedback from members which follow the renewal letter each year and therefore this year's subscription increase is almost purely inflationary, with subscriptions increasing by only 5%. This increase is reflective of the difficult economic environment members face, but we must look to close the gap between our subscription rates and that of our competitors.

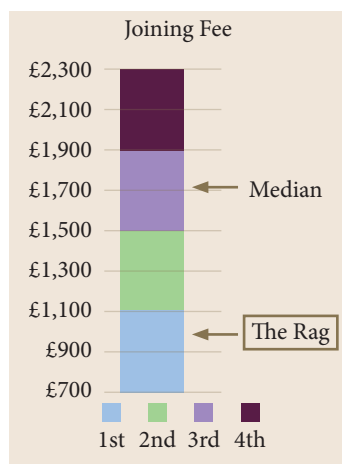
In real terms, this means the 35-74 annual subscription will rise just £55, from £1110 to £1165, while the 75+ subscription will increase by just £40 to £995. We have also endeavoured to keep the joining fee increases to only 5% this year because of the ongoing improvement works around the Club - a move which protects existing members, whilst remaining extremely competitive.

The 2026 joining fee of £950 is still well in the lower quartile.



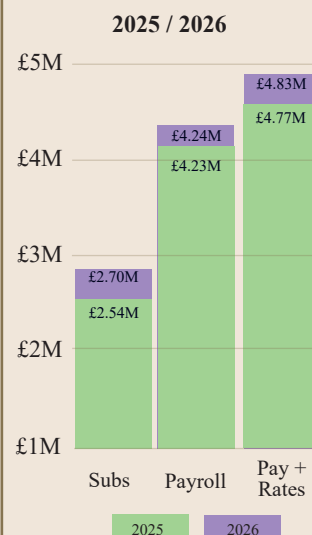
During 2026, we intend to commence work on the gym and the refurbishment of the bedrooms, which we hope will greatly enhance the membership experience. The team are also working on producing a new website, our digital window to the world which should increase our exposure thus aiding recruitment and

the experience of existing members.



Finally, I wish to say thank you to you, our members for your incredible support this year in helping this great Club remain not only financially secure, but able to move forward with major refurbishment works. I wish you all a very happy Christmas and look forward to seeing you in 2026.

*Mark Spragg,  
Membership Chairman*



# Stories From Our Staff

## The Rag visits HMS Duncan



On Thursday, 3rd July, Tim Smart and Luke Macpherson from the Membership Office set off for Portsmouth to spend a day aboard HMS Duncan, whose primary role is to provide protection for the Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carrier. Thanks to The Rag donating a prize for the ship's end-of-year raffle, we were guided by Lieutenant Will Calderbank throughout the warship. We were welcomed into the Captain's quarters for tea and coffee, where we discussed The Rag's modern-day military connections and the Captain's own career. Conversation turned to HMS Duncan's recent deployments, as well as how our day was going to pan out.

### Operations Room

We visited the Operations Room, where cameras and phones were not allowed, and gained fascinating insight into the ship's offensive and defensive systems. After collecting our camera, we stepped outside to explore the ship's formidable weapons and sensors. Forty missile silos housed the Sea Viper air-defence system, and we were lucky enough to watch the 4.5-inch naval gun realign. The main radar, at the heart of the ship's combat systems, can reportedly track an object the size of a tennis ball up to 1,000 miles away.

Close-in defence was equally impressive. The Phalanx CIWS, capable of firing 4,000 rounds per minute, formed part of a layered system that included decoy mechanisms, six force-protection mounts, and a 30mm cannon for small boats. Moving to the aircraft facilities, we saw the hangar, which can house two Wildcats or a single Merlin helicopter, while the flight deck can accommodate a Chinook. Maintenance equipment, spare rotors, and launch points for the small boats were on display, and unlike Type 23 frigates, Duncan stores these boats internally to reduce radar cross-section and improve protection from the weather.



### Time with the Officers

Sitting in the Officers' Wardroom at the end of the day, it was easy to see how different life aboard HMS Duncan feels. The welfare spaces are far more comfortable than on older ships, and our host even has his own cabin, a small perk not always found at sea. The Control Room showed how the crew keeps everything running, with a live incident chart ensuring seamless handovers. Replenishment at sea is a careful balance, with fuel and food running down fastest, and NATO arrangements keeping supplies flowing. Hearing that the ship had recently returned from monitoring Russian vessels in the Channel, quietly gathering intelligence without contact, was a reminder of the serious purpose behind it all.

It was a fascinating visit that gave us real insight into life aboard one of the Royal Navy's most advanced warships, where cutting-edge technology sits alongside centuries-old traditions of seamanship, discipline, and camaraderie.

## Chairman's Christmas Fund

You may recall from last year's narrative that Government regulation on staff tipping dictates it is shared monthly between all staff including agency workers. This system is working well. The Chairman's Christmas fund is available to help recognise the huge contribution made to Club life by our loyal staff, both front of house and working behind the scenes. I urge you to contribute again to this fund using any of the methods below. I know how much our wonderful staff team appreciate your generosity and willingness to say 'thank you' at Christmas. *Neil Johnson, Chairman*

### VIA THE WEBSITE

Login to the Club's website and click on 'Make Payment' from the options across the gold bar at the top of the screen. Under 'Make a Card Payment' select 'Staff Fund' from the drop down list. Enter the amount you wish to contribute and your card details and then click 'Confirm'.

### AT RECEPTION

A contribution can also be made at the Reception Desk by cheque, cash or by debit or credit card.



### VIA BANK TRANSFER

If you wish to make a contribution by bank transfer, please find the Club's bank account details below. Please quote reference "Christmas Fund".

Sort Code: 16-00-38  
Account Number: 00737981  
Account Name: Army & Navy  
Club Chair  
Bank: RBS

# Club Member Events

Discover this Season's Exciting Events and Services



**CAROLS AROUND  
THE TREE**  
1<sup>st</sup> December



**TRI CLUB  
CHRISTMAS CAROLS**  
3<sup>rd</sup> December



**NEW MEMBERS  
RECEPTION**  
12<sup>th</sup> December



**CHRISTMAS WINE  
& CANAPÉS TASTING**  
17<sup>th</sup> December



**MEMBERS  
CHRISTMAS LUNCH**  
18<sup>th</sup> December



**BURNS NIGHT  
SUPPER**  
23<sup>rd</sup> January



**TALK ON THE ROYAL  
AND RUSSIAN NAVIES**  
3<sup>rd</sup> February



**BRIEFING ROOM WITH  
LORD ROBERTSON**  
4<sup>th</sup> February

## Army and Navy Club Festive Offerings

Make this Christmas truly special with a little help from The Rag! Discover our signature A&N Festive Mixed Case of Wine, stylish Festive Tote Bags, and charming Rag Christmas Cards - perfect for spreading festive cheer.

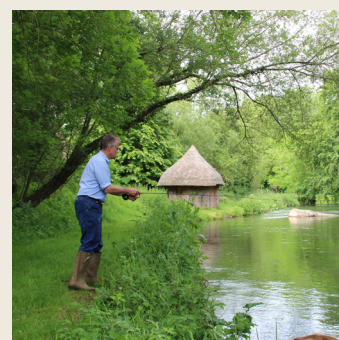
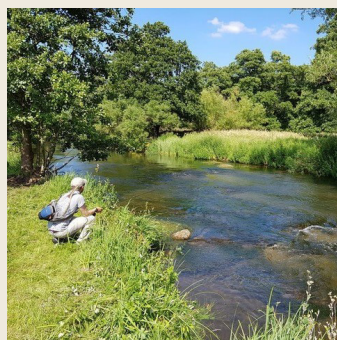


The Army & Navy Club Festive Mixed Case of Wine, prepared by our friends at Davy's for delivery only, offers a carefully curated range of classic favourites for the entire festive season. Orders are available in the A&N Wine Club section of the Club Shop. Additionally, For collection only, treat yourself or a loved one to a Festive Tote Bag, packed with Club Wines, homemade Christmas Pudding or indulgent A&N Chocolates. Orders can be placed at the Club Shop.

And this year, we are excited to unveil our brand-new Christmas Card design. Alongside this festive newcomer, our other hand-designed Rag-themed Christmas Cards are available online or from Reception - ideal for sending a little Rag-style joy to friends and family.

## Army and Navy Club Fly Fishers' Association

The Army & Navy Club Fly Fishers' Association (AN-CFFA) is a syndicate open to Rag members and provides access to some of the finest chalk stream fishing in the world. They are able to negotiate discounted prices with the huge advantage of offering an attractive variety of fishing on different rivers. Locations include Test on the John Lewis Water at Leckford, Itchen at Brambridge, Kennet East of Hungerford, Avon North of Amesbury and White-water North of Hook.



The Association is well supported by Club members and vacancies occur each year. So if any Rag members are interested in gaining access to some truly wonderful fishing on a few of the most sought after rivers in the trout fishing world, then please contact the Honorary Secretary, Richard Munro: [ancffa@btinternet.com](mailto:ancffa@btinternet.com)

# Bedroom Upgrades

## Recent Bedroom Renovations

Over the last few months the team have been hard at work delivering a complete redesign of two of our bedrooms in preparation for the full bedroom refurbishment works, due to start in 2026. This redesign has gone much deeper than a coat of paint and new furniture, stripped back to the wiring and plumbing, making sure the rooms are ready for many more years of service and that they operate more efficiently. These two bedrooms are now bookable for members and we look forward to receiving your feedback to help inform the final design for the remaining bedrooms. Leading the project from a design perspective was David Wilder, founder of David Wilder Design. We recently caught up with David to discuss his inspiration and the design process.



*“In the refurbishment of the two bedrooms, we have brought a fresh, thoughtful approach to the interiors. The bedroom design follows the concept “Air, Land & Sea”, with three subtle schemes inspired by the colours and tones of the corresponding services and natural landscapes. By combining timeless shapes and a welcoming palette with the comfort and practicality of modern design, the interiors feel both refined and relaxed, yet enduring, ready to serve the Club for generations to come.”*

At the heart of David’s philosophy lies a devotion to bespoke British craftsmanship. Each piece of furniture and every interior detail is custom-designed and made in independent British workshops and family-run businesses, ensuring authenticity and exceptional quality. This commitment not only sustains traditional skills but also celebrates the artistry of local craftspeople, while providing value for members.

*“The design process for The Rag has been deeply personal and hands-on, shaped through a collaborative journey that celebrates creativity, connection, and the shared joy of bringing ideas to life. At the heart of it all: a commitment to leaving spaces better than they were found. This ethos is reflected in reducing carbon footprints, incorporating recycled materials, and championing British craftsmanship.*

We hope this approach gives the interiors a sense of tradition while remaining flexible and contemporary, in keeping with the Club’s storied past. We look forward to accommodating members in these new rooms and receiving your feedback.

