



# THE RAG

ARMY & NAVY CLUB

## Welcoming Spring At The Rag

Issue 71 - March 2026

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# ARMY AND NAVY CLUB UPDATES

## Update From The Chairman

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March has arrived, the daffodils are blooming across St James's Park, the Club is buzzing and already our thoughts turn to the rich programme of upcoming

events as Spring leads to Summer. We are indeed fortunate to have Lord Kim Darroch as our Guest of Honour at the Club Dinner on 27th March. It could not be more timely, with war once again raging in the Middle East, to hear Lord Darroch's insights as our former Ambassador to the United States during President Trump's first term, having served previously as the Prime Minister's National Security Advisor. This is one of The Rag's keynote events of the year and following members' suggestions last year the dress code will be Black Tie with Decorations, or female

equivalent, better reflecting our traditions as a Military Club.

Further ahead, but with pressing timelines, may I direct your attention to the 2026 AGM scheduled for Wednesday 1st July. Two current Board Directors will be standing for re-election, Lizzie McWhirter, who continues to be very active in Club life and Lt Col Mark Spragg, who Chairs the Membership Committee. One Director, Georgina Whiteside, will stand down having served two full terms of 3 years. Time to say this again later, but on my own behalf and that of my predecessors, I should formally like to thank Georgina for her selfless service to the life of the Club. Her contribution will be missed.

The Board is well balanced going forward but one gap in our skills matrix is a legal professional, preferably with HR experience. If that is you, please do consider putting yourself forward to join the Board. Laurence Denton can provide details of the process and nominations need to be with her as Rag

Company Secretary by 1st May 2026. Other nominations from both Military and Non-Military members are, of course, most welcome.

Finally, a few words about an important review of the physical state of the Club-house which we have been conducting, together with professional advisors, over the past 6 months. Unsurprisingly, for a building constructed over 60 years ago, we are discovering some areas in need of urgent attention and some with a longer timeframe. Your Board is pulling together a long-term plan to address these issues whilst living within our means. Happily, our Club is well managed and profitable. We will therefore continue to build our financial resources so that all works can be addressed in a timely fashion thereby protecting the unique culture of The Rag for future generations.

*Neil Johnson  
Chairman*

## Update From The CEO

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As we look ahead to the coming weeks, we are preparing to commence a number of important projects across the Club, and I am delighted to share a significant milestone with you.

Work to develop the permanent ramp outside the Club is scheduled to begin on 13th April. The project is expected to run for approximately 12 weeks, with the main ramp construction taking around eight of those weeks. This marks the start of a long-awaited improvement, and I know many of you will share my enthusiasm in seeing it finally underway.

Following completion of the ramp, attention will turn to the left-hand side

of the entrance to further enhance and rebalance the Club's frontage. As part of these improvements, we will also be varnishing the existing wooden window surrounds to complement the timber handrail of the new ramp and create a more cohesive appearance.

During the early stages of the works, there will be approximately 10 days of unavoidable noise while stone is broken through. All ground floor activity will be relocated during this period; however, some vibration may still be felt throughout the building. To minimise disruption, noisy works will pause daily between 12:00 and 14:00 to allow for a quieter lunchtime. In addition, a new intercom system will be installed at the start of the ramp to further improve access and security.

Inside the Club, refurbishment of the Drawing Room will begin this Saturday and will take approximately four weeks, with the room reopening on 27th April in time for the Watch Sup-

per. We will also begin replacing several fire doors from this Monday on the ground floor and in back-of-house areas, with works continuing over the coming months.

While it may be the Easter holiday period for many, it will be a particularly busy time here as the team coordinates these smaller projects, all aimed at enhancing the overall member experience.

Finally, a brief reminder that security remains a top priority. Please do not be concerned if you are asked to present your membership card or provide additional details when entering the Club—these measures are in place to ensure the safety and comfort of all members.

Thank you, as always, for your patience and continued support.

*Sara Kent  
CEO*

# MEMBERSHIP NEWS

## Update From The Membership Chairman



In the newsletter of April 2025, I referred to the optimism of the year ahead from a membership point of view.

I am pleased to say that this feeling was well justified on a number of fronts, in particular

the increasing number of new members. However, as always there are challenges and, as I write, the political and economic climate has become even more acute.

Despite these challenges, January 2026 saw our best start to the year since 2022, in terms of both new members joining and resignations at renewal. With over 160 enquiries and applications in the pipeline, the Membership Team of Tim, Luke and Rose are working hard to ensure this momentum continues into the second quarter of the year. We are pleased to see there has been a notable increase in members wishing to rejoin the Club, along with a steady increase in applicants referred by current members.

At the last Membership Committee meeting, we discussed and approved changes to streamline the

application process for those still serving in the British Armed Forces, in recognition of their current service. We anticipate this change will help make membership a more attractive proposition, especially for younger officers. Further changes aimed at increasing military applications will be considered at our next meeting at the end of the month. As you should have seen by now, members were recently encouraged to update their details, particularly their service information for our military members. This newly recorded data will help influence future decisions and so I ask those who are yet to update their details to do so at their earliest convenience.

A key ambition for 2025 was to retain as many ex-Naval Club members as possible, ahead of their first renewal since joining the Club later this year. I am extremely pleased to report that so far, 327 members have decided to renew their membership with us after the 31st August this year, a number which far exceeds any expectations set from the available data. On behalf of the Board and the team, we wish to thank all those members who have chosen to renew their membership with us. We look forward to providing a home away from home for what we hope is many years to come.

*Mark Spragg*  
Membership Chairman

Average  
**46** Age of  
New  
Members  
in February  
2026

New Joiners  
**91** in 2026

Compared to  
2025 **40**

Resignations  
**149** in 2025

Compared to  
2024 **188**

## Club Table

The Club Table in our Coffee Room has long been a symbol of camaraderie at The Rag. It is a designated table for members dining alone, offering an opportunity to meet fellow members, share conversation, and enjoy the company of others. A silver Ragamuffin statue denotes the Club Table - a nod to the Club's enduring spirit and the nickname affectionately adopted by members after Captain Billy Duff's '*rag and famish affair*'. Unfortunately, the Club Table fell silent during the Covid period, as social dining had to be curtailed for everyone's safety. Once more, we are excited to celebrate this convivial tradition.

We invite all members who are dining alone, or simply wishing to meet others, to join us at the Club Table. It is a wonderful way to meet more like-minded members of our thriving community.

Starting in April, a bottle of Club Claret will be placed on the table every Friday for members seated there to share. Also, the Club Table will be hosted by a senior member of staff, or Rag member once a month, adding to the conversations and connections fostered around it.



# HAPPY INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

## Celebrating Our Female Members

In years past, International Women's Day has offered us a welcome opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate the achievements of women both within and beyond our community. This year, we spoke with a selection of our female members to gain insight into their experiences at the Army and Navy Club.



My family joined The Rag in September 2019, and when I turned 18 in January 2021, I was thrilled to receive a birthday card with my own Rag Membership. During the pandemic, I stayed connected with the Club through online events and regular visits once the Club re-opened, which showed me just how much it has to offer and why it feels like a home away from home. A highlight was celebrating my 18th birthday with a dinner in the Library - truly unforgettable.

The Business Centre is one of my favourite spaces, helping me stay on top of university work and, soon, my law conversion course. I also love the Ribbon Bar and Terrace - a welcoming place to meet friends, enjoy excellent food, and feel well looked after by the staff.

I've enjoyed attending Club events, including flagship events such as the Club Dinner, Christmas Lunch, Waterloo and the Trafalgar Night Dinner.

I'm excited to help launch the new Young Members Circle, particularly through organising reeling events, and I welcome ideas from other young members to enrich the social programme. Register your interest by emailing [membership@therag.co.uk](mailto:membership@therag.co.uk).

*Jessica MacDonald,  
Member*



From a family with a long history of military service, I joined The Rag 12 years ago. After graduating and returning to Northern Ireland, I wanted a safe space in London - a home away from home - and the Club has always offered that. My late father was a Military Member for over forty years, and our family membership continues to this day.

Whether dining in the Ribbon Bar or Coffee Room, spending time with family and friends, using the Business Centre, or attending events, the Club's atmosphere is always welcoming and relaxing. I especially enjoy using the Club table in the Coffee Room.

With four siblings, who are also members, living across the UK and abroad, the Club is an ideal gathering place for us. The Business Centre and the new soundproof pods in the Dolphin Room provide excellent spaces to work remotely, all easily booked through The Rag portal.

*Georgina Whiteside  
Director*

## Managing Through A Crisis



Rag members were privileged to be joined by Catherine Lewis La Torre CBE, hosted by Rag member Helen Erhabor earlier this year. Catherine is a leader whose career has spanned private equity in London and Paris, pioneering work in venture capital and growth investing, and ultimately helping to shape how the UK finances its businesses. Her reflections were framed around the theme of "Managing Through a Crisis."

Rag members heard how in 2020, as the pandemic swept through every sector of the economy, Catherine stepped up from her role as CEO of the Bank's two commercial subsidiaries, British Patient Capital and British Business Investments, to serve as Interim CEO of the British

Business Bank - the government's engine for supporting smaller businesses. Under her leadership, the Bank not only maintained operations but delivered the Government's Covid business finance schemes at unprecedented scale, deploying billions of pounds in emergency loans and guarantees that sustained hundreds of thousands of UK businesses through lockdown and beyond.

Her story was beneficial for our members and is a reminder of how diverse experience and a willingness to step up can make a real difference - even in the most challenging moments.

# CLUB MEMBER EVENTS

## Discover This Season's Exciting Events



**Classical Rag Concert**

**5th April**



**A Talk by Nick Higham**

**8th April**



**Coffee + Connect**

**15th April**



**The Rag Masterclass**

**25th April**



**Watch Supper with James Dowling**

**27th April**



**Fireside Chat with Richard Brooks**

**28th April**



**Cigars: An Introduction**

**21st May**



**Friday Cheers!**

**29th May**

## Easter At The Rag



As Spring brightens St James's Square, we are delighted to welcome members to a relaxed and traditional Easter period, offering familiar surroundings and comfort that make it feel like a home away from home.

From 30th March to 12th April, members can take advantage of our weekend room rates when staying two nights or more, and can enjoy a complimentary glass of our Club Wine and a small Easter treat. Traditional Afternoon Tea will also be served throughout this period in the Ribbon Bar & Terrace, with reservations requested at least 48 hours

in advance, featuring an assortment of delicate finger sandwiches and cakes prepared by our chefs. Bookings for Afternoon Tea can be arranged by contacting Tamzin at [tamzin@therag.co.uk](mailto:tamzin@therag.co.uk). On Easter Sunday, members may enjoy an exclusive Rag Concert in the Marlborough Suite followed by a classic British roast in the Coffee Room overlooking St James's Square. Book your stay online, or contact [reception@therag.co.uk](mailto:reception@therag.co.uk).

For members wanting to share the Club with friends and family, we are pleased to accommodate guests in accordance with Club rules, ensuring they experience the same comfort and hospitality as Rag members.

*Martina Curlejova  
Front of House Manager*

## Summer Bedroom Offer

Looking ahead to the warmer months, from 27th July to 6th September 2026, members may enjoy our weekend room rates when staying for two nights or more - an ideal opportunity to enjoy a relaxed Summer stay at the Club during the quieter weeks in the city.



# FOR YOUR INFORMATION

## Postcards From...



**Queensland Club**  
**Queensland, Australia**

While in Brisbane for the second Ashes Test match, we took the opportunity to visit the Queensland Club using our Reciprocal Club arrangement. Conveniently located in the city centre and within easy walking distance of our accommodation in the South Bank area, the club was a perfect spot for lunch before heading to the Gabba for the day/night match.

The Queensland Club offered a welcoming, home-from-home atmosphere. The rooms were elegant but relaxed, and we thoroughly enjoyed a delicious lunch. The members we met were friendly and made us feel very comfortable, which made the experience even more enjoyable.

Overall, it was a great way to experience the city while taking advantage of the reciprocal club benefits - a relaxing pause before an exciting day of cricket.

*James Cohen, Member*



**The Singapore Cricket Club**  
**Singapore**

During my recent holidays, I used the Club's Reciprocal Clubs in Singapore at The Singapore Cricket Club, in Australia at the RACA Sydney and the Tasmanian Club in Hobart. Both the RACA and Tasmanian Club offer basic accommodation, but the advantage for me at both clubs is their excellent central locations in Sydney and Hobart.

All three clubs I visited were very welcoming; however, for dining, the Verandah (family picture) at the Singapore Cricket Club was the most memorable and an

absolute delight. The Rag's reciprocal arrangements with other Clubs are a key benefit and I found The Rag's online platform for sending Letters of Introduction to Reciprocal Clubs very efficient and easy to use.

*Chris Hillis, Member*



## Collections Corner



After several months, with the help of Rag Member Richard Munro, the Club's Library of nearly 5,000 books has now been catalogued and is accessible online for members to browse for the first time, with the majority of titles available to borrow. To locate a book, simply search the PDF by title or author. Members may borrow as many books as desired, for the maximum borrowing period of three months. There is a charge of £1 per week, which contributes to the purchase of new titles. If you would

like to donate a book or make a suggestion, please contact me on 020 7849 8304 or [amy@therag.co.uk](mailto:amy@therag.co.uk). I am available on Tuesdays and Fridays.

As a part of the cataloguing project, around 300 surplus titles have been donated and will be sold at a charity bookshop, with the proceeds going to Woody's Lodge. Woody's Lodge is a communications and social hub at Royal Navy Wales' HMS Cambria which aims to provide a meeting space for veterans of the Armed Forces, Emergency Services and Reservists to re-engage with life, their families and their communities. **Click here to find out more.**

*Amy Plewis*  
*Collections Manager*

## Rag Circles

Our Rag Circles bring members together through shared interests. From pilates and Book Club, to shooting and sailing, there are plenty of activities to enjoy in good company here at the Club, across the UK and also virtually via Zoom. Whether you already have experience, or are a complete novice, you are welcome to contact the Rag Circles to find out more!



**Chess**  
**Circle**

[chess@therag.co.uk](mailto:chess@therag.co.uk)



**Rag Golf**  
**Circle**

[golf@therag.co.uk](mailto:golf@therag.co.uk)



**Club**  
**Choir**

[choir@therag.co.uk](mailto:choir@therag.co.uk)



**Fly Fishing**  
**Circle**

[fishing@therag.co.uk](mailto:fishing@therag.co.uk)