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KIMBERLEY CLUB

No Doves

A short address by Mr A. S. Hall, President of the Kimberley Historical Society on the occasion of a Dinner given to members of the Johannesburg Historical Society at the Kimberley Club on Friday, 6th April 1973.

It seems to me quite extraordinary that when I went to gather some material for this talk on this men's Holy of Holies, I found that the historians were ladies! The published history of the Kimberley Club was written by Constance Warner, the wife of a previous Secretary, whose father, Mr J.R. Booth was a prominent member of the Club. During the Kimberley Centenary celebrations Mrs Judy Hoare, who has many family connections - on the male side - with the Club, particularly her grandfather, Mr William Pickering, who was a Secretary and later Director of De Beers, ^{prepared} gave a series of talks ^{for} over the SABC on the Kimberley Club. She also had the advantage of having Mr E. H. Farrer as stepfather, who on his retirement as Secretary for Finance, came to live in Kimberley as a director of De Beers. He was a great Club man and a most distinguished President of this Club. I am also indebted to my wife, whose interest stems from stories of her father, her brother, Dr Paddy Collins, and of her maternal grandfather, J.J. O'Leary, a pioneer of the diamond fields and a member of the Cape Legislative Assembly, traditionally, of course, 'agin' the Government, and also, let me add, not an admirer of Rhodes. She would love to give this talk and she would do it far better than I.

Incidentally, the History of the Kimberley Club by Connie Warner was printed free of charge to the Club by Monsieur Tesson in his press at Tangiers, Morocco, a gesture he made in appreciation of the treasures, its history and the kind treatment meted out to him during his visits to the Club.

From these sources, I will give you a 'hodge podge' of something of the history of this Club.

Sir Ernest Oppenheimer, who in my opinion was a far greater man in many ways than Rhodes - this observation I agree may be unfair because I knew Sir Ernest personally and Rhodes died long before I was born. Anyway, Sir Ernest speaking here in 1935 at a dinner in his honour, said:

"The Kimberley Club is not just a Club in the ordinary sense - it has a tradition all on its own. The memory of the men who made the new and greater South Africa is enshrined in this building." The last sentence can now be repeated about Sir Ernest and it will certainly be said some years hence of Mr Harry Oppenheimer, his son and our present President. Indeed, personalities, more than the historical building and its treasures have been the reason for the great repute in which the Kimberley Club is held. This Club was originated by great men and it has been sustained by great men, all of whom have played a meaningful part in the destiny of South Africa.

After considerable preliminaries, the Kimberley Club was officially established on the 1st August 1881, the 74 founders each subscribing £100. Notable amongst many notables - ~~Theo Reunert, founder of Reunert and Lenz~~, Star Jameson, of the ill famed Jameson Raid, Sir J.B. Robinson, mining magnate, C.D. Rudd (amongst his lesser known accomplishments a partner of Rhodes in an ice-making machine) ^{Theo Reunert, founder of Reunert and Lenz} and, of course, Cecil John Rhodes himself. In the canvas city of those days, a double-storey building made quite an impact. Neville Pickering wrote to his brother (Mrs Judy Hoare's grandfather William) in 1882:- "It beats anything of the kind I ever was in. We have our dinners and dances - one finds oneself in evening dress every night. It's ruination to health and pocket. And then our Club is such perfection. Electric bells wherever you like to touch. Velvet pile and Turkey carpets to walk upon and then one loses oneself in a luxurious lounge."

Before the emancipation of women - have men today lost the freedom of our forebears? - members spent a great deal of time in the Club playing billiards, cards, etc., from mid morning to the early following morning. Dr. Jameson, we are told, was an inveterate gambler, and although there is no record of Rhodes participating - no doubt he was far too busy with the serious business of amassing his fortune - he dominated Club life in those days.

He was normally dressed in baggy white corduroy trousers, loose collared shirt and grey sack coat, a garb which would not be acceptable today, although we did have a non-conformist in recent years in Mr Cam Kiddie. He used to introduce himself as "I am Kiddie the Baker" and he flouted the committee regulations by wearing an open neck shirt. Rhodes used the Club as his business headquarters and he astutely chose this venue to come to terms with Barney Barnato, whose greatest aspiration was to become a member of the Club and who controlled the Kimberley Central Company in the Kimberley Mine (now the Big Hole) whilst Rhodes had the controlling interest in the De Beers Mining Company in the De Beers Mine on the East side of the railway station, ^{this mine,} which, incidentally, was only re-opened in 1963 after closing down for fifty five years. Rhodes wanted the Kimberley Central Company and Barnato finally capitulated, if you can use that term when you talk of a consideration of £5 338 650, on condition, however, that he be made:-

- a life Governor of De Beers;
- a member of the Cape Parliament, and *thirdly*
- a member of the Kimberley Club.

Rhodes conceded the first two without demure because he said Barnato had an invested interest in De Beers, and because of this great stake, he was entitled to have a say in the councils of the country, but he did not commit himself on the third condition, saying "I shall have to see about this."

However, Barnato insisted and Rhodes in the face of some opposition, I have no doubt, connived this. Barney's method of election is not on record and certainly does not come from the sources I have acknowledged, and my version is probably the figment of somebody's imagination, but the story goes that when the Club's Secretary found the voting box rather heavily weighted on the black ball side, he came downstairs from his office, tripped on the last step, spread eagled, causing the balls to be all mixed up, and the committee then had to give Barnato the benefit of the doubt!

To more serious things - from this Club went forth after a luncheon on August 4th 1888, a trio of C. D. Rudd, Rochfort Maguire and "Matabele" Thompson to obtain the concession from Lobengula which they did obtain and which led to the formation of the British South Africa Company (later the Chartered Company) and the founding of Rhodesia.

In 1886 the Kimberley Club was burnt to the ground. According to the Diamond Fields Advertiser report "the flames, startling in their suddenness, encircled this palatial building at night, when the members were engaged in having their dinner." In 1895 there occurred a second great fire, and the Diamond Fields Advertiser reported that in the early hours of the morning of October 11th, the Kimberley Club "with its world-wide reputation for comfort and pleasant companionship" was almost destroyed. It lamented: "The Club has housed within its portals, distinguished travellers from

every part of the Globe, was regarded as one of Kimberley's architectural beauty spots, and was looked upon with pride, not only by its members, but by the general public."

For the third time the same building routine was adopted, tenders being called for not exceeding £6 000, and the Club was rebuilt on its present lines. The 1895 fire is commemorated by a beautiful stained glass window half-way up the main entrance stairs, showing "1881 - 1896" and depicting the four seasons of the year. Later Sir Ernest Oppenheimer presented a stained glass window for the enclosed verandah on the East side of the Club, now used as the Dominoes Room, dominoes being a popular pastime of members of both the Kimberley Club and the Kimberley Golf Club for many years.

During the siege of Kimberley which lasted for a period of 124 days from 14th October 1899 to 15th February 1900, the Club was a hive of military activities. Colonel Kekewich had his headquarters here and was in overall command of the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, the Kimberley Regiment and the Town Guard, which actually contained a company formed of members of the Club, nearly 100 strong. Rhodes, who was no military man even though he commanded the Diamond Fields Horse from 1890 to 1893 and was Hon. Colonel of the Kimberley Regiment at the time, resented this and clashed with Kekewich over the leadership question.

He left the Club and took up residence at the Kimberley Sanatorium. later successively the Hotel Belgrave, the Convent of the Holy Family, and recently just made over by De Beers for a nominal sum for the new museum complex. Despite this difference of opinion between Rhodes and the military, when General French made his triumphant entry into the city, his first call was on Rhodes at the Sanatorium, this historic meeting being depicted by a print from the London Illustrated News which I have borrowed for this occasion from the office of De Beers Company Secretary, who is fortuitously away at the moment! The clock in the picture is also in his office.

The historic Christmas Siege Dinner was up to the high standard, if not even more elaborate, than of any normal Christmas, and a further culinary achievement was the provision of "Siege Soup" organised from a soup kitchen under the management of Captain Tim Tyson, Secretary of the Kimberley Club at the time. The Club, used as it was as a military headquarters, was a legitimate target for the Boers' shelling, but the only Club casualty on record was that of Mr Carstairs Rogers who, standing just outside the premises, was wounded by shell splinters. He refused to be taken to hospital, saying "Hospital be blowed, take me into the Club." There, fortified with much whisky (both the patient and the surgeon) and using a diningroom table for the

The Club has many proud possessions, and the Club Chairman, Dr Hal Lowenthal, has agreed that we will break a Club rule and allow you a view of some of these after dinner. Pride of possession is von Herkomer's portrait of Rhodes, said to be the only portrait for which Rhodes sat. There is a story about this in which I was personally involved. As Secretary of De Beers, I received a letter from an American enclosing a colour photograph of a portrait of Cecil Rhodes, painted by Edwin A. Ward in 1889. This was formerly in the possession of the Marquis of Queensbury, and the American thought that De Beers might be interested in acquiring it. I was much taken with the potential of this painting and wrote to Sir Ernest Oppenheimer, suggesting that we should acquire it for De Beers. Sir Ernest replied to leave it alone because the only genuine life portrait of Rhodes was that done by Sir Hubert von Hermoker in the Kimberley Club. I quote from his letter: "As early as 1903 when ^{had} Albert Beit was staying with ^(owned by von G. in his residence) F. H. Hirschhorn and me at the Lodge, ~~at~~ ^{(not} the Duggan Cronin Bantu Gallery) Hirschhorn remarked that that portrait was the only one for which Rhodes had sat, and in this Alfred Beit expressed his agreement." However, I had already started a chain of enquiries and eventually received an Iconography of Cecil Rhodes by Dr Anita Brookner, undertaken for the Rhodes Trust at Oxford, which listed many

portraits for which Rhodes had sat, as well as sculptures, photographs, etc. In all, the Iconography lists over 150 articles. Sir Ernest was sent a copy of this document, but returned it without comment as I did not pursue the argument.

There are these other lovely paintings on these walls, the origin of wome of which had been lost in the limbo of the past. There is the picture over the fireplace The Penitent Magdalene (after Piatoni 1708/1787)presented by Onah Humphries, wife of Basil, and mother of Anthony, present here tonight. There is also the Dutch tile picture which we can identify as having been donated by Bernard Klisser. We have the colourful painting of Selous, the renowned guide and hunter. Then we have the Weighing Chair, which was donated by Lord Randolph Churchill in 1892 in appreciation of this "most comfortable and hospitable club". You will see this, and also the Ram's Horns with silver snuff box on the bar counter presented to the Club by C. H. Bonas in 1896.

The Club has been honoured with visits from Royalty. The Duke of Connaught in 1906, the Prince of Wales in 1925, Prince George (later the Duke of Kent) in 1934 and His Majesty King George the Sixth, Queen Elizabeth and Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret in 1947. Prior to and after a luncheon, their Majesties occupied Room No. 4, now No. 5, on to which a resident, Mr Joe van Praagh, at his own expense, built a bathroom in 1935. If you look on the North side of the building,

prior to the departure from the Club of their Majesties, a Club attendant came running down the stairs with a diamond ring left on the basin of the bathroom by Her Majesty. King George was overhead to say: 'Really, Betty, you are careless.' There was drama also during the Duke of Kent's visit. A fish bone stuck in his throat and he retired to his room. Dr Angus Galloway who practised as a dentist in rooms just opposite the Club was urgently summoned, and he removed the bone from the back of the Duke's palate. Dr Galloway who died recently, became a distinguished Chairman of the Club, and later a Honorary Member.

My main contribution to the Club has been for the benefit of the ladies, because it was I who persuaded the committee, to convert the billiard room at De Beers expense, into a ladies lounge - this is the place where we congregated before this dinner. Initially, the sunken floor for the billiard tables remained and it was quite a feature, but the step down proved to be a hazard for the old and the lame, and so in the recent redecoration, the floor had to be levelled. I might say the considerable cost of this new decor has been borne personally by our President, Mr Harry Oppenheimer.

I have already kept you too long, and having brought you more or less up to date on the recent developments of the Club, I must now close with my thanks for the great honour I have been accorded by being asked to give this address. Thank you for your kind attention.

No Downers

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