

Minutes of the 1077th meeting of the Manchester Pickwick Club held at the Black Horse Hotel on 16th November, 1989

Before the meeting had even got started, Solomon Pell had to go home because he felt off colour – if the rest of the members had realised how the meeting would turn out, they might also have claimed some infirmity.

In order to take advantage of the 40-watt lamp thoughtfully provided by the hotelier to throw light on the proceedings, it was necessary to rearrange the tables and chairs. As the meeting was very poorly attended, that didn't take long, but it seemed rather unusual to find Mr. Pickwick sitting, as it were, at the wrong end of the table. Or perhaps not!

The meeting proper commenced at 8.28 p.m. when Pickwick called for a minute's silence in memory of the late Tom Roker, former D.C. of the club, who would be sadly missed by members.

Pickwick then tried to stamp his authority on the meeting by using the Pickwickian pledge to justify fining all members who, he claimed, were avoiding their duties and leaving Alfred Jingle to carry them out. This caused an outcry from members but Tadger, having already fined himself twice for having no badge or tie, insisted that the fines be paid. Perhaps, as the Right Honourable John Major, MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer sits down to consider his 1990 budget, an examination of the methods used by Tadger to collect monies would be of value to him.

Most inhabitants of the Greater Manchester area having been guests of the club at some time or other, it was becoming more difficult to find somebody prepared to attend. On this occasion Grummer had persuaded a Mr Peter Wright to come to the meeting and Mr Wright was so enthusiastic that he offered to leave the meeting to save Grummer the task of having to introduce all the members to him as the sole guest. His offer was laughingly rejected; nobody gets out of a Pickwick meeting so easily, and Grummer commenced his presentation. Unfortunately, this was interrupted by a private conversation between Pickwick and Dodson and Grummer's complaint about this interruption led to his being fined by Pickwick.

At this point Jack Hopkin received a telephone call saying that Pell was feeling better, but an offer to send a car to bring him back for the rest of the meeting led to an immediate relapse. Mivins, who's attendance had been delayed by a prior commitment, arrived at this moment and having paid the customary fine for late arrival, was directed to a seat immediately in front of the radiator which was glowing with heat – a sort of double penance which was quite uncalled for. In fact, there was probably more light reflected from the radiator than from the lights!

After the minutes had been read and approved as a correct record of the proceedings of the last meeting, Dodson admitted that not only was he "jet-lagged" when the last meeting took place, but was also drunk. Several members, predominantly Jingle and Stiggins, expressed disgust at the thought that a club

member should admit to drunkenness, a most un-Pickwickian condition.

In mitigation, Dodson explained that members had been met off the aircraft by their wives and taken home to recover from the trauma of the flight. He further revealed that Weller (who he described as a "snivelling little so-and-so") had slept throughout the flight and was therefore unaware of an ad-hoc Pickwick meeting at which it was agreed that discretion was the better part of valour and that domestic arrangements should take priority over club requirements on this occasion. In an aside he suggested that Weller's girlfriend was on holiday in Majorca so Weller had nothing to do that evening and had attended the meeting for the sole purpose of getting other members into trouble.

Pickwick agreed that no useful purpose would have been served by further aggravating three angry wives and that the members involved had acted correctly. He added that any other members would have adopted a similar line when faced by an angry spouse, but Jingle claimed that was not correct, citing his own situation as proof.

A letter had been received from Slumkey apologising for absence from both the November and Christmas meetings due to illness, the treatment for which involved a complete ban on alcohol. Members agreed that such treatment was inhumane and that it was the treatment not the alcohol which should be banned. The customary gift sent to aid the recovery of a sick member being of an alcoholic nature, members were quite unable to think of an alternative until Stiggins pointed out that if Slumkey received the usual alcoholic gift, he could then offer a drink to members who called to see him. This proposal was greeted with relief by members and arrangements were immediately put in hand for a bottle of Scotch to be delivered.

The P.O.R. & I was carried out by Bantam who merely read the titles of chapters followed by questions about those chapters. Only Pickwick was able to answer correctly and Dodson's complaint that Bantam had misled members by suggesting an alternative form of questioning to that actually carried out was met by a fine. Bantam then asked Dodson a further series of questions which he was unable to answer, and suggested a further fine might be appropriate. Bantam followed this suggestion by asking whether anybody else had anything to say and when Mivins congratulated him on the excellent reading, fined him for creeping. It is with regret, therefore, that these minutes must record the poor reading and unfair questions at the November meeting, together with a request for refund of the fine for creeping which is now considered to be inappropriate.

After considerable difficulty, the DC managed to find somebody who was prepared to propose a vote of thanks to Pickwick and the vice chairman, who's performance had been so mediocre that this is the first reference to him in these minutes.

In proposing the vote of thanks, Lt. Tappleton said it was some time since he had been able to attend a club meeting but that this had heightened his perception of the proceedings. The

meeting had been handled with considerable aplomb by Pickwick and both he and his vice chairman were to be congratulated. There were, he felt, areas where the timing could be improved; for example, it took 30 minutes to rearrange the room and carry out the necessary arrangements prior to commencement of the meeting, and a six-course meal could have been consumed in the length of time taken to feed the few members in attendance. In contrast, members who wished to leave the room for the purposes of micturition were discouraged to try and speed up the proceedings.

The proposal was seconded by Mivins who forgot to record what he said and is, therefore, unable to minute his comments other than to confirm that there was nothing complimentary in what was said.

Responding to the vote of thanks, Pickwick said he and Jingle had deliberately delayed the start of the meeting to allow the more tardy members to take their places and that widespread use of the fines box might apply in future. He then took the unprecedented step of inviting his vice chairman to stand with him and toast the members, a step received with much acclamation.

"Good Neet Owd Friends" was led by Jingle and followed by the National Anthem.

The fines box contained £4.91 and the raffle raised £2.40.