

Minutes of the 1080th meeting of the Manchester Pickwick Club
held at the Black Horse Hotel on 15th March, 1990.

The 1080th meeting of the Manchester Pickwick Club commenced at 8.15 p.m. in the presence of Pickwick, Dodson and Mivins. Other members were fined as they arrived, amidst many complaints about the absence of a quorum etc.

In the absence of the proper vice-chairman, Jingle was once again appointed as vice, probably on the understanding that he will be made to do the job until he does it properly – they do say practise makes perfect!

Several members were fined for failing to wear a club badge or tie and Pickwick even went so far as to congratulate Dubbley on his sartorial elegance, unfortunately sadly misplaced, before fining him.

The aggressive nature of Pickwick's performance was evidenced by his suggestion that members should be fined for singing the toast to Mr. Pickwick out of tune, but he relented when it was pointed out that most members couldn't tell whether they were in or out of tune and that such a fine would be most unfair.

Although the meeting had only just started it was quite obvious that Pickwick had already lost control and Dodson started making arrangements to appoint the P.O.C's, only to be interrupted by Pell who said that he had already agreed with Stareleigh and Nupkins that they would perform that duty. This was followed by several members referring to each other by their non-Pickwickian names whereupon Stiggins imposed fines and instructed Tadger to collect the appropriate amounts. Pickwick revived long enough to fine Stiggins for taking over his job, but was unable to make any impression on the usual chaos resulting from the P.O.C's attempts to take the drinks orders.

To try to regain control, Pickwick instructed Grummer to introduce members to guests, but he had only just started when Dodson reminded Pickwick that the food needed to be ordered. Grummer's presentation was immediately delayed so that the appropriate orders could be placed but then continued as though no interruption had ever taken place, which proved at least one person knew what was going on.

Weller arrived at this point, claiming that he had been delayed by Job Trotter because the "Queen" was calling but the minute writer may have misunderstood this excuse because despite enquiries, no further explanation of her Majesty's movements was forthcoming. He went on to suggest that he had had nothing to eat and was forced to rely on the proven charity of the club to provide sustenance, whilst the convivial company was even better than the food.

Whilst this was going on, Pickwick and Pell suddenly realised that they had the wrong nameplates in front of them and quietly changed

them over when nobody was looking in the hope that their mistake had gone unnoticed. To further confuse the issue, Pickwick broke with tradition by taking the 9.00 p.m. toast at 8.55 p.m.

Dodson took the opportunity to complain once again about an imagined stain on his character by claiming that if Pickwick had paid his fine, Mrs Bardell wouldn't have had to go to prison, so the culprit was not Dodson. He also complained that when introducing members Grummer had suggested, amongst other things, that at the United Grand Junction Temperance meeting Mrs Dodson's husband was drunk – an obvious reference to himself. Grummer immediately announced that he was referring to Dodson the cobbler and Dodson the solicitor was mollified by this.

Pell said that he had visited the Wendover as a possible site for the ladies evening but was of the opinion that it was impractical because an exclusive room was not available; Stiggins said he would contact an establishment in Prestwich (the Park Hotel) to see what facilities they could offer.

Brother Tadger left the meeting at this point and Perker proposed a vote of thanks to Tadger for "calling in".

The reading, which was taken from chapter XXIII, was excellent, as usual, but many complaints were voiced about the speed of the questions and the partiality shown by Nupkins who had replaced Tadger as Fines Officer.

The meeting had become so confused by this time that Pickwick sought to calm down the proceedings by invoking Rule 8 and asking Sam Weller to entertain the members by recounting a story. Weller chose to talk about his recent trip to Spain – or the return therefrom. His version of the story was that for the sake of economy, a half bottle of scotch was purchased at the duty-free shop and taken on the aircraft where it was used to "augment" drinks purchased on board. During this process the bottle had to be passed from seat to seat and Sawyer became very red-faced when he was nearly caught topping up his drink by the steward; but despite all this drink, the jet-lag and the stress of nearly being caught, Weller was still able to get to the meeting when the other travelling members were absent.

Dodson said this version showed that Weller's memory was clouded; they had actually bought two half bottles of scotch which were passed from seat to seat on the aircraft under cover of a newspaper with the coded message "here is the crossword". Weller had agreed with the others not to attend the meeting because of possible domestic problems but was so drunk he had forgotten the arrangements.

Sawyer claimed both stories were flawed; there was a bottle of scotch, there was a newspaper, there was a steward, and they did get caught!

Both visitors responded when invited to do so by Pickwick: the first thanked Grummer for inviting him and the other members for making him so welcome; the second, who has attended Pickwick

meetings before, merely commented on the difference in weight of the fines box since his last visit.

The vote of thanks was proposed by Weller who congratulated both Pickwick and the vice for managing to keep out of what had purported to be an organised meeting and turned out to be rubbish. The P.O.R & I had made an effort to liven the meeting up but even he spoiled the effect by looking guilty when fining members for failing to answer their question. In all, he was glad he had attended the meeting because it reminded him of the reason he sometimes misses a meeting.

In seconding the vote of thanks Dodson referred to the visitors and acknowledged that one was on his first visit to the club and could be excused for thinking he had enjoyed it – the other had been before and should have known better than to pretend he had enjoyed it! He went on to say he hoped Pickwick had enjoyed his year of office; the members appreciate the efforts he makes to attend and wish both Pickwick and Mrs Pickwick well. Equally appreciated were the efforts of "super-sub" Jingle who has acted as vice on several occasions during the year.

In response Pickwick said he always thought of toast as something crisp, warm and fresh which was nothing like the toast just offered. The proposer had virtually slandered the P.O.R & I for his avuncular appearance and innocence of countenance, but he put this down to the fact that the proposer was from foreign parts and knew little about correct behaviour. He added his personal thanks to Jingle for his support during the year, then he and Jingle stood and toasted both members and guests.

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

The fines box contained £9.49 and the raffle raised £3.00.