

Minutes of the 1212th meeting of the Manchester Pickwick Club held at the Moorside Social Club on 28th March, 2012

The meeting was opened at 8.05 p.m. Unfortunately, it was one week later than it should have been because a double booking had meant that the usual day was not available, the Moorside Social Club's AGM having been arranged on that date. Members were advised that CCTV cameras had been installed in all the public rooms at the club and many spent the entire evening preening themselves before the cameras; the main contender for TV fame and fortune was Ben Allen whose elaborate hand gestures were clearly intended to display his personality to the viewers, whoever they might be.

Before the meeting proper could start, Tupman advised members that although the Manchester Club could rightfully claim to be one of the oldest, by sheer chance he had been perusing a copy of Louisa May Alcott's book 'Little Women' and had discovered a reference to a 'Pickwick Club' set up by those ladies. The book, which had been written in 1868, suggested they had produced a weekly 'Pickwick Portfolio' with each of the girls responsible for a particular section. There were a number of comments about the sort of reading material favoured by Tupman who tried, unsuccessfully, to claim he was merely vetting the book before giving it to a young relative.

Whilst this discussion had been taking place, Dodson had disappeared to the toilet and concern was expressed at the length of time he was taking there. Snodgrass was deputed to visit the loo to make sure everything was fine and when Dodson appeared shortly afterwards it was realised that Snodgrass himself was now missing. He reappeared eventually before a search party could be formed complaining about the smoke alarm which had been bleeping away for months! Whilst waiting for Snodgrass to reappear, Dodson took the opportunity to thank members for their good wishes during his recent hospital stay.

Ben Allen had volunteered to act as POC and having 'borrowed' a piece of paper from Mivins and also a pen to write the order with, disappeared to fetch the drinks. Pickwick suggested he would wait for the drinks to be served as the first item on the agenda was a toast to himself. The drinks arrived and were passed round only for Pickwick to realise that no drink had arrived for him! Ben Allen immediately rushed downstairs to bring the missing drink (with, of course, the anticipated gestures to suggest intense apologies for the benefit of the CCTV).

The meeting continued in its usual chaotic form until after the minutes had been read when Winkle arrived without either tie or badge and was taken to task by Pickwick. There followed the usual discussion about interpretation of the rules such as whether the wearing of a badge obviates the need for a tie or whether the tie has to be a Manchester Pickwick Club tie or whether ties from associated clubs are acceptable. On this occasion the problem was compounded by Grummer who claimed he had advised Pickwick prior to the meeting that Winkle was attending another meeting and would arrive as soon as possible - what would be the situation if that other meeting required its

members to wear their particular meeting tie or badge? It had been noted that certain members were having difficulty following the arguments because they had hearing difficulties and a suggestion was put forward, tongue in cheek, that the club should provide batteries for hearing aids to allow all members to participate fully in the meeting. Grummer felt this was not fair to other members, for example, nobody would contribute towards the costs of his glasses and Pickwick said that hearing aid batteries were provided free by the NHS. Winkle said he didn't get his hearing aid batteries free and Pickwick said it was his own fault for trying to be posh and going private!

As an item of other business, an inquest on the recent event at Nantwich was discussed; Jingle said he had a great weekend which was more than just good. Despite having forgotten his suit and going home without his razor and tie he wasn't the only one whose enjoyment was marked by an inability to function correctly because Pickwick couldn't find his hearing aid for a while and had forgotten his tie, Grummer had sat on his glasses and Dodson had mislaid his key and had to wander round Nantwich trying to locate the other Pickwickians whose need for liquid refreshment had proved more urgent than waiting for Dodson. It goes without saying that the missing group were run to earth in a pub.

The POR & I was led by Weller who told Pickwick that if he answered his question correctly, that would be the first thing he had done right all evening. A good example of this was that when the next round of drinks was served Pickwick claimed he had requested a 'Caffreys' but had not got what he wanted - he knew this because Caffreys was always served in a glass bearing the Caffreys name down the side. Mivins pointed out that the word Caffreys did appear on the glass but on the opposite side to the one Pickwick was looking at!

The vote of thanks to Pickwick and the vice chairman was presented by Winkle who claimed it was the most shambolic meeting he had ever attended. The members had sat all night waiting for some guidance from the Chair but all they had got was more confusion. So many fines had been levied that Jingle's feet must be killing him (Jingle admitted that at the commencement of the meeting he had been 6 foot 5 inches tall but was now worn down to 5 foot eight inches although his arms were correspondingly longer due to the weight of the fines box). Winkle said he wasn't one to criticise but there had been no control of the meeting whatsoever and without the many interruptions from Pickwick the meeting could have finished by 9 o'clock instead of dragging on 'til 11. He wondered whether Pickwick could be sent for counselling but accepted that the cost in Pickwick's case might be too much for the club to bear.

Seconding the vote of thanks, Weller said Pickwick had had a difficult year although he didn't know he had had a difficult year because he couldn't remember most of it. He had tried to bribe members in the bar prior to the meeting and whilst, as an ex-copper, he was in favour of a bit of bribery the weight of the fines box showed how his efforts had failed miserably. In the meantime, the vice chairman's gavel had seen so little use it was beginning to rust and develop cobwebs. Next year promises to be interesting when the vice chairman occupies the chair!

'Good Neet Owd Friends was sung by all and followed by the National Anthem. The raffle raised £6.00 whilst the Fines Box contained £18.80.