

Minutes of the 1220th Meeting of the Manchester Pickwick Club held at the Moorside Club on 16th October 2013.

It might have been the prevalence of senility amongst the members or, alternatively, the fact that this was the new Mr Pickwick's first evening in charge; whatever the cause, the atmosphere was the same as in the House of Commons when someone cries 'I spy strangers'. The reason for this confusion was the attendance of the former Alfred Jingle's son John, who was occupying the seat formerly allocated to his father, and the question in everyone's mind was, 'Did we enrol him as a member at the last meeting.' Some thought 'yes' and others 'no'. In the end it was decided by Grummer who initiated him into the club. He was promptly given the job of Fines Officer like his father before him. There had been a slight hitch in the ceremony when Ben Allen claimed the initiation ceremony couldn't proceed because he had forgotten to bring the KY jelly.

As already referred to, this was Pickwick's first evening in the chair since his appointment and his intention to run the meeting in a workmanlike manner was evident from the opening gavel which almost broke the head off his gavel and was only one minute after the official start time. The response from Ben Allen in the Vice-Chairman's seat was equally impressive, but the meeting went downhill from there.

Weller who had been appointed as P.O.C. claimed that the newly decorated room was excellent but that the chairs were too low, so that he felt he was wiping his nose on the table before him. This claim led to a further round of arguments which only ceased when Pickwick gavelled a number of times and threatened fines all round. The new Fines Officer stood ready to carry out his duties but the threat fizzled out and he was forced to return to his seat.

Members seemed to be in an argumentative mood at this meeting and the next problem was raised by Dodson who claimed that the initiation shouldn't have taken place because the correct rules hadn't been followed. Grummer said everything had been done 'by the book' as he had notified the Secretary in writing that John Ennis wished to take his father's place as a member of the club and the Secretary confirmed that he had received that communication and had seconded the proposal. Dodson accepted the fact that the members at the last meeting had agreed to John's membership but said it should have been put to the vote formally before the initiation rather than being a general acceptance of the request.

This started yet another argument by several members who claimed that they had never seen a set of rules and that this was a deliberate ploy by older members who could make the rules up to suit their requirements knowing that the general members did not know whether they were being 'conned' or not. It was agreed that the Minute Writer would produce a copy of the existing rules for discussion by members to see what changes were necessary.

The club had a visitor at this meeting in the form of Mike Fildes who brought greetings from his father, Smangle, who now resides in Cornwall. Grummer asked Mike who had taken over his father's business and whether or not he still had any of the Vietcong military boiler suits left for sale.

Smangle had bought them and hoped to make a nice profit selling them as dog walking outfits. Mike said he thought there were still some in the store room but as they were camouflaged he hadn't been able to find them. Grummer said he was thinking of buying one so that when he went shopping to the greengrocers he could steal vegetables without the owner seeing him.

The introduction of Members to Visitors was performed by Tupman with his usual excellence and Pickwick asked the Minute Writer to record his vote of thanks to Tupman. However, the presentation was subsequently marred when Weller and Grummer were fined for interrupting Tupman and refused to pay the 20p fine levied, claiming that it should only be 10p.

Stiggins said that when he occupied the Chair he had agreed an increase to 20p and the new Pickwick confirmed that this had been applied since that time. Members were divided about whether this was correct or not as they had left it to the previous fines officer to claim the appropriate amount. To prevent any escalation of the argument, Pickwick proposed that the general fine be fixed at 20p and most members agreed. However, both Dodson and Grummer said that Pickwick was making unauthorised changes and that the level of fines could only be agreed at the A.G.M.

After the POR & I was performed by Weller and everyone had been fined whether they had answered correctly or not, Dodson produced a newspaper article which he had brought from Spain for the Dowager Mrs Jingle which didn't come in the appropriate category. When he said he would only bring more if that lady had become addicted to it, the new Alfred Jingle (a member of the Constabulary) read him a formal caution about his future activities.

It was reported that Smangle had recently moved into a new property in Cornwall which was large enough to accommodate members. He had written that the air fare from Manchester to Newquay was only £60 so he could collect members from the airport in his van and hold a meeting at his new address. He thanked the members for their past friendship and said he would retain his membership and attend meetings whenever he was available to do so.

Dodson's problems with ticket distribution proved the raffle was a complete fiddle as usual but on this occasion the beneficiaries were mostly NARPO members; in fact, Dodson's raffle fiddles have become so frequent that he no longer tries to disguise them.

Pickwick's good intentions failed again when the 9 o'clock toast to absent members didn't take place till 10.35 p.m., after he had been reminded that the meeting was drawing to a close and the toast hadn't been taken.

The vote of thanks to Pickwick and the Vice was proposed by Stiggins who said he knew he wasn't very good when he occupied the Chair but that the new Pickwick had sunk to a new low and the Vice had done little during the meeting but play with his knobkerrie. When he was Pickwick he was constantly bullied by Dodson and Grummer and the meetings were so trying that he had to have a large brandy when he got home after a meeting. Tonight he was going to need two!

Seconding the vote of thanks, Dodson said he didn't recall bullying Stiggins, in fact he did all he could to help him in view of Stiggin's limited ability. He felt that most of Stiggin's comments were correct but on the whole didn't think that Pickwick had done too badly considering it was his first time in the

Chair. He said that Pickwick was wrong to try and alter the fines but by the same token was worried about the apparent paucity of the fines collected despite Pickwick's claim that he would rule with a rod of iron. He had little to say about the Vice except to point out to members that Ben Allen had deliberately broken the gavel or 'Rongo' which had come all the way from Africa; he was sure that Snodgrass would return to Africa at the club's expense to replace the damaged article.

Pickwick thanked the members for their kind vote of thanks and said he hadn't realised how much stamina was needed to keep the members in check.

Good neet owd friends was badly sung by all and was followed by the National Anthem.

The raffle raised £6.50 whilst the Fines Box contained £3.90 plus a Mexican coin which had been introduced by a member who knew that Dodson himself had recently visited that country and therefore it took little deduction to work out who had put the coin in the fines box.