

Part thirteen of *A History of Thingwall Recreation Centre* – a personal memoir by the late Frank Nicholson

I started to write this history to let all members know how the Centre began, how it grew, and about the people who made it all happen. I am not an experienced writer, but I hope you have found it informative and enjoyable; for me it has been interesting and revelational experience. It has allowed me to look back with hindsight at so many of the events through the years, and with a deeper appreciation of the many people who have filled my memories. There have been so many shared pleasures, many little disputes, and many sad losses, all the ingredients of life in fact, but, it seems to me, there has been steady forward progress towards a warmer and closer community which I hope and trust will hold together through the coming years. Much in modern life seems to lessen the value of communal life; you've got something good, so look after it.

Some lessons should be drawn from a record such as this, and each will, no doubt, find his own, but there are some to which I would draw attention.

Society changes, and being a gradual process, it can take time to realise it is happening, so beware, don't let society leave you behind. Probably the greatest danger to the well-being of the Centre is when new management teams, no doubt with the best of intentions, seem to have a desire to alter the Constitution. We have a very good Constitution, which has changed little over the life of the Centre; the main change being the one that was necessary before the Centre could install a licensed bar. Other minor changes have taken place for equally good reasons: lowering of age limits for membership, and the establishment of extra Officers, i.e. Vice Chairman, Membership Secretary, Booking Secretary, all necessary due to the much increased membership. These changes nevertheless, have left the Constitution basically intact. Here it should be understood that attention to rules is not a simple matter. The Constitution as it stands has the approval of the Charity Commissioner, and any alteration thereto must first meet with his approval if we are to continue to enjoy Registered Charity Status.

Back in 1981 it was not an easy matter to convince the Local Planning Authority that what we were planning to do was not a "change of use". Had we failed to convince them, the Centre as we know it would not exist today. They did agree eventually and sent us what they called a 'Letter of Determination', to the effect that planning permission was not required for so long as we ensured that a licensed bar was ancillary to Sectional activities. Further to this, the Local Licensing Authority also has an interest in our Constitution, in particular Rule 3 which refers to the Wine Committee. I have gone into enough detail earlier on this rule, and have since checked with Sergeant of the Police Department responsible for Licensing and Club Registration to verify that the law was unchanged in this respect. He made it clear that failure to observe this rule could lead to our removal from the register. So it can be seen how carefully any rule change must be approached.

I feel it important to issue these warnings because I have heard of some members expressing the opinion that we do not need a Wine Committee. I have also heard of suggestions of a major alteration to the Constitution, which, to a degree, would separate meetings with Section Chairman from the deliberations of the Management Council. In fact, a draft document exists in records which expressly refers to Constitution "Management" and Constitution "Section". Nothing could be more calculated to raise concern on the part of the Charity Commissioner and the Local Planning Department and I can see no possible good reason for those suggestions; if management business becomes too time consuming, the Council has the right to create subcommittees to consider special subjects, such subcommittee submitting their conclusions to the MC.

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