

An updated history of The Southgate Club

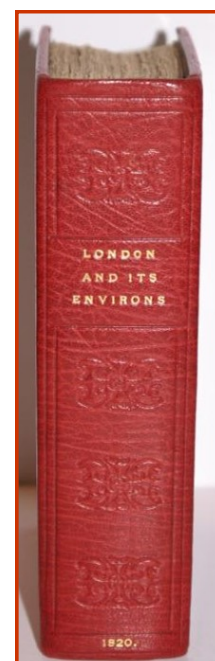
[Established in 1820 or before]



The Southgate Club has had many name changes over the years and it had long been thought that the club was founded in 1851.

However, recent research clearly shows the Club actually dates back to 1820, (as the “Southgate Reading Society”). The earliest reference found thus far is a wonderful book, (seen here on the right) published in 1820. The book has the prestigious title, ***“London & It’s Environs, The General Ambulator Metropolis Vicinity”***.

The purpose of the publication was to show all the respected and worthy establishments within a 25 miles radius from the City of London. The Southgate Reading Society was at that time based in the Old School House, Blue Row, South Street, (halfway down Winchmore Hill Road).



The curator of the **Southgate Reading Society** was a Mr Long, (who lived in Chase Gate, next to the Bell Inn, on the corner of Chase Side and Chase Road). For nearly 30 years they provided books to local schools and the residents in the Southgate and Winchmore Hill area. In 1849, due to the fact it was equidistant between Southgate and Winchmore Hill, the society was renamed the **Southgate and Winchmore Hill Library**.

The trustees of the Society and the Library were one and the same. Namely; Mr John Miles, Mr Long, Dr. Roberts and the Rev. John Sale, (the then vicar of Southgate). In the ensuing few months, mainly due to the business interests



of Mr Miles, (Bookseller & Publisher) they amassed some 2500 books and 38 watercolour paintings. As a result, the Old School House in South Street became too small. Later in the same year, saw the first of several relocations of the Library. Each move was to newer cottages, (all along Winchmore Hill Road and all closer to Southgate). This cycle continued until 1850 when the Library moved into Mr Long's residence. The Winchmore Hill part of the name was dropped and the trustees, who were adamant something of the original **Southgate Reading**

Society name should be retained, renamed the institution **The Southgate Reading Room and Library**.

Dorothy, (pictured above) a helper of the Rev. John Sale provided patrons with; coffees, teas, cakes and the occasional sherry.

Some Important Dates in the History of the Southgate Club

- 1820 - 1849 The Southgate Reading Society
- 1850 - The Southgate and Winchmore Hill Library
- 1850 - The Southgate Reading Room and Library
- 1882 - Headquarters of Southgate Nondescript Cycle Club
- 1888 - Arthur Rowland Barker designs the new building
- 1888 - Public meeting to raise finances for 17 Chase Side
- 1889 - New building opened at 17 Chase Side, [on 80 year lease]
- 1921 - Freehold of 17 Chase Side acquired and the bar
- 1932 - The Southgate Social Club
- 1941 - V2 Flying bomb destroys Club solicitor's office in King Street, Cheapside – many historical records lost
- 1947 - Incorporation of The Southgate Club Ltd
- 1980 - Obies Bar extension built

In 1850, Mr Robert Blagden, (a school master and estate manager who lived on the corner of Blagden's Lane) became the first treasurer and secretary of the **Southgate Reading Room and Library**. The President of the Club at that time was Mr John Miles.

In the **Enfield Archive Museum**, there is a unique part of our club's history. Namely, an album containing some 250 photographic images of all the members of the Club in 1872 and pictures of rural Southgate.

The album was presented by our president John Miles to Robert Blagden in 1872 on his retirement following 22 years as an officer of the **Southgate Reading Room and Library**.



Presented

to

MR. ROBERT BLAGDEN

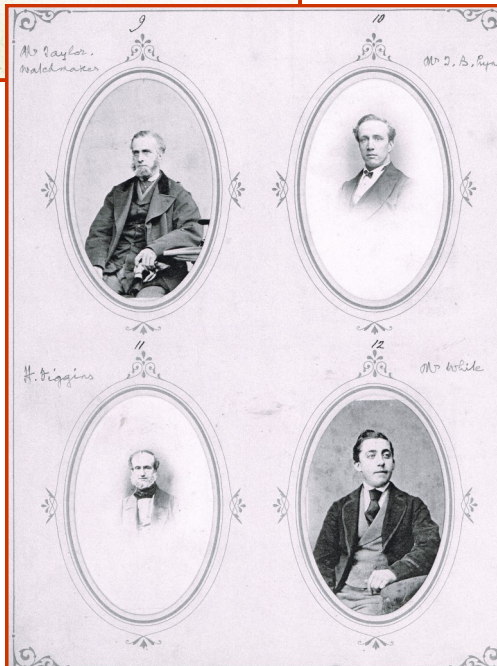
by the

Members of the Southgate Reading Room & Library

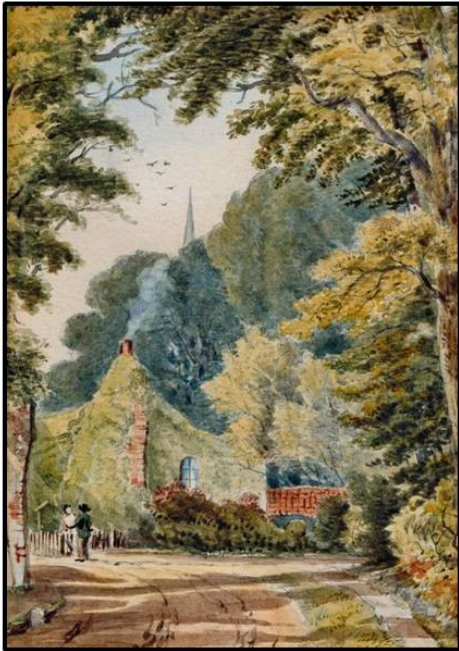
as a token of their affectionate esteem upon his retiring from the Office of Treasurer & Secretary held by him from the formation of that Institution in 1850.

Wm. Miles President

Southgate Sep. 30. 1872.



PAINTINGS IN THE SOUTHGATE CLUB



Originally 38 watercolours, however only 16 remain. There was an exhibition of the paintings in 1851 to mark its first anniversary.

Attributed to a GP Dr John Cresswell of Winchmore Hill.

Though not particularly valuable, these watercolours date to before 1860 and provide a unique history of Southgate in the 19th Century and the local area.

Dr John Cresswell, (1804-1891) moved into Winchmore Hill in 1830. Known as the old Doctor, (having retired at a very mature age) he was a prolific watercolour painter and sketch artist, (allegedly Dr Cresswell carried his paints and easel everywhere). It is well documented that the good 'old' doctor was also a member of the ***Southgate Reading Room and Library***.

Although all the paintings are unsigned, Dr Cresswell's style is unique. His watercolour pictures depict how rural Southgate was during the mid 19th Century, with a residential population of just over 250 people.

It is also known the paintings precede 1862 because one of them is of the Weld Chapel (Arnold's Chapel), which was demolished around 1862. Dr Cresswell's daughter, Henrietta, wrote a book in 1908 "Memories of a lost village—Winchmore Hill".

The Southgate Reading Room and Library was a private institution for members only; however the building was open to the public. In fact, it became the first tea/refreshment house in Southgate. There are also records showing a soup kitchen being ran from the property during both the first and second world wars.

Further, it was used as the headquarters of the **Southgate Nondescript Cycle Club** in 1882. This became the Southgate Cycling Club in 1886. In 1888, the Rev. James Baird, (who succeeded the Rev. John Sale) Mr John Miles and the famous Mr Long, felt his premises were too small for such a great and upward institution. Together they commissioned a local but famous

architect **Arthur Roland Barker** to design and erect a new building, (on the current site). The land was acquired from the Rising Sun, (on an 80 year lease) and the total cost of the building was £1000. This sum being paid by **The London City Mission**, (which is still in existence today) as well as a few local dignitaries.



Arthur Roland Barker, also designed the Palmers Green Town Hall and many superb buildings in London. Mr Barker lived in the old school house on Southgate Green, (the Edwardian building with school bell, opposite Ye Olde Cherry Tree).

The institution was established with the sole purpose of providing a Reading Room, Library and a recreation room for the inhabitants of Southgate, (and eight surrounding miles). Membership was open to males over 18 years. Lady members could use the library, but not the recreation room. The subscription was 6 shillings, payable quarterly or annually, (about 13p in today's money).

An important issue, (which even extended to a clause in the lease) was that no intoxicating liquor could be sold on the premises. Fortunately, this was revoked 1921.

The management of the **Southgate Reading Room and Library** was entrusted to five committee members. In fact many of the rules of the Club exist to this day. One such rule being;

“ No betting. Drunkenness, bad language or disorderly conduct shall be permitted in the Club. In the event of any member willfully infringing the articles or rules, (or conducting himself in a manner derogatory or injurious to the character or interests of the Club) the Committee may suspend the privileges of membership for any period, or may call upon such member to resign his membership”.



The privilege of using the **Southgate Reading Room and Library** was to be allowed for local sports clubs and village associations. However political and sectarian meetings have always been barred, although there was a debating society.

LONDON MIDDLESEX GAZETTE SEPTEMBER 1882

“ it may not be inopportune to call attention to The Southgate Reading Room and Library as an institution where wholesome amusement and instruction may be found”

“Few village communities, if indeed any, have anything compared to that named above”

“it has frequently been the means of bringing together persons of different social positions”

LONDON MIDDLESEX GAZETTE SEPTEMBER 1892

“the institution has been fortunate in having had the support of all classes, and although there have been many serious difficulties, it has come out of them none the worse for the ordeal”

“ there is a fine billiard table, a bagatelle table, a piano, and a room fitted up with gymnastic appliances. “

“During the winter evenings, under the auspices of the Southgate Debating society, smoking concerts are held.”

The original founders of our institution had a great vision as to what would make **The Southgate Club** a unique and sustainable institution. Their ideal, (revolutionary in the 1800's) was to promote a non class based organisation. Accordingly, religious and political debate was prohibited and the membership was open to all echelons of society.

The membership in the 1890's was a whole cross section of the society in Southgate. The Club was, (and remains) totally independent, without affiliation to any other organisation, (whether it be political, military, academic or Masonic).

This is why, despite all the adversity of the past 194 years, (including two World Wars) it has survived.

During the period between opening and 1914, (some 94 years or so) the **Southgate Reading Room and Library** was supported by membership subscriptions and from charges for the billiard and snooker facilities.

During the 1914-1918 war, many younger members were in the forces, and income suffered so much the trustees were asked to support the club financially, which they did. In 1921, the building sadly needed attention, (electric light and new heating arrangements needed to be paid for). Once again, the trustees assisted the Committee over the difficult period. Later on that year, the trustees secured the freehold of the current premises, saving £13.15 yearly.



Interest free loans were made to the institution by the trustees and this helped secure the Clubs future. The freehold was purchased on December 5th 1921.

Incidentally, 1921 was also the year Southwark Bridge was opened, (by King George V and Queen Mary) China became Communist, the first *'live'* sports radio broadcast was made in the USA and back in England the very first British Legion Club was opened and *'Poppies'* were first sold, (some 99 years after we opened).

However, following the loans the difficulties of the Committee continued;

“The coming of the buses caused the younger members to seek their pleasures further afield”,

Introduction of the first public library in the area also impacted the use of the library. resulting in a drop in membership and subscriptions. The contents of the library were dispersed through the Club’s charity **“The Southgate Cultural Fund”**.

The purpose of **The Southgate Cultural Fund** was;-

- A). Purchase of books of artistic and cultural value to be presented to local schools.*
- B). Purchase of works of art and reproductions thereof to be presented to/or loaned to school in the North West Ward of Southgate.*
- C). Grants given towards the costs and expenses to parties of persons residing in Southgate to museums, picture galleries, exhibitions, concerts and places of historical and cultural interest.*
- D). The delivery of lectures on subjects of educational or cultural value in and around Southgate.*
- E). The provision of funds for other cultural or recreational activities of value in the mental, moral or physical education of any such person as aforesaid.*

The **Southgate Cultural Fund**, which is a registered charity is still in existence today. However it is no longer under the management of the Southgate Club.

Around 1931, following a meeting of the trustees it was decided, (in order to increase income) the institution should be merged into a new Social Club. This would allow members to purchase alcoholic refreshment without leaving the premises. Due to the sale of alcohol, (and the customs of the day) a decision was made to '**bar**' lady members. Accordingly, women were restricted from entering certain parts of the club and also on certain days of the week. Back In 1924, a quarter of all members of the **Southgate Reading Room and Library** were female. Yet, they were immediately barred once alcohol was introduced to the Club.

Happily this has now changed. The Club welcomed back our first full lady member at the annual general meeting on the 27th April 2013. A historic day!

In 1931 , the premises were enlarged and altered, this added a bar, a new recreation room and lavatory accommodation. A year later in 1932, the 'new' **Southgate Social Club** came into existence. Some 15 years later, (25th June 1947) the institution was incorporated into a limited company **The Southgate Club Limited**.

Unfortunately, much of the historic documentation of the club was lost during the great blitz, when in 1941 the Club's solicitor's office in King Street, Cheapside, was destroyed by a German V2 "Flying Bomb". Sadly, only a few documents remain.



Founder members included famous Southgate residents such as the Rev. James Baird, John Miles and Robert Blagden. It was thanks to Sir Thomas Lipton, see picture, (Lipton Teas) a member of the club, that we managed to secure the freehold of the site for the benefit of the Southgate community.

The Club still has the original snooker table provided by Sir Thomas Lipton.

The club has featured many exhibition snooker matches, including renowned players such as Alex Higgins, Dennis Taylor and Doug Mountjoy.

There is documentary and photographic evidence that the Club was visited on more than one occasion by Sir Winston Churchill.

In 1905, the Edmonton Parish records detail of an exorcism ceremony being conducted at the Southgate Reading Room and Library. However the Southgate Club '*ghost*' has yet to be substantiated.



There are over 60,000 references related to the Southgate Club in various archives. This updated history is a very small part of the available research material and it will updated periodically as more information comes to light.

In 1980, the building was extended towards Crown Lane. The 'new' function room is today used for private hire, parties, weddings and the extremely popular tribute nights held each month. These events are open to everyone, so why not ask for an 'events list' and come along!

The current building is one of the oldest in Southgate and is part of the Southgate Circus Conservation Area.

The Club is a "not for profit" organisation ran by an elected management committee of twelve directors, (who are all volunteers). It is also the oldest non affiliated private members club in the UK. The ethos of the Club is unique and one of the reasons it has survived for so long. As trustees for the Club our predecessors have asked that we should always ensure;

"that something of the ideals which animated the founders of the Institution should always be retained, and that we be of service to Southgate and the community".

Information collated and researched by Marek Pospieszalski, Chairman 2014. Version 6

Edited and put into sensible English by Gary Malcolm and proofed by Sunil Chawla

Bibliography

Edmonton newspaper Paul Pry (1839)
The Southgate Messenger (1857)
The Southgate Chronicle (1859)
The Southgate and Friern Barnet Sentinel
The Recorder (1909)
Palmer's Green & Southgate Gazette (1910)
London Middlesex Gazette (1881-2013)
The Enfield Archive Museum
Edmonton Parish records
Census records
Bruce Castle Museum
The War Office
British Museum Library
The London Environs
National Newspaper Archive