

THE CASTLE MOUNTAINEERING CLUB 21st ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
(my personal contribution at the end of the dinner at Sicklehome Golf Club, Bamford,
following guest speaker Ian Smith))

<After Ian's scintillating talk, it's very much a case of "after the Lord Mayor's Show", I'm afraid. I have it on good authority that when Sean [Jennings] and Andy [Smith] were seeking a boring old fart to wind up tonight's proceedings, they consulted my friend Paul [Goodlad] who confirmed that no-one could better fit that job description than yours truly, so here I am, a blast from the past. We have with us our founder-member Ashley Turner, and I rather wish that he was the one standing here; by the time I finish, you may well wish that as well! My brief is to indulge in a nostalgic look back to the earliest days of the Club, so here goes.

As we all know, the Club was founded by Alec Barclay, an expatriate Scotsman who had climbing and general mountaineering experience as a member of JMCS Edinburgh. He was a regular at the Castle Inn, Bradway, and he had the very special gift of enthusing those around him. He attracted an enthusiastic following of Castle regulars, very few with any mountaineering experience, and established the familiar routine of Thursday nights at the Castle and climbing on a midweek evening and on Sunday mornings, with the added bonus of away meets in Wales, The Lakes, Scotland and elsewhere. It all revolved around the Castle and it was taken for granted that we would return there for drinks after all our outings, even (would you believe!) our Scottish Meets.

It has to be said that we were all very happy there, but Alec had a greater and far-reaching vision and believed that the long-term future of the club required that we had our own clubroom. So he persuaded Bill Horner, the then area manager of Stones Brewery and Mike Collins (another brewery man) to in turn persuade Ada Bennett (the redoubtable landlady of the Rising Sun Inn on Abbey Lane) to allow us the use of the beautiful but dilapidated old building at the back of the Inn for our Thursday evening meetings. That permission was originally for casual use only, but Alec had far greater ambitions and at his request our architect member Kerry Brooksbank produced the imaginative designs which were to result in the Clubroom as we know it.

It was at this juncture that Alec dropped a veritable bombshell. He was returning to Scotland and wanted me to take over as Hon. Sec. This was truly a daunting prospect, as Alec was in every way the heart and soul of the Club he had created. And I knew that we were at a crucial moment in the Club's history and that even with Kerry's guidance the building of the clubroom would require an heroic effort by our members, none of us with any building experience.

The story of the creation of the clubroom was brilliantly told by Mike Anderson in "The Castle" book produced to mark the 21st anniversary of the Club. All I would emphasize tonight is that in the event it required weeks and months of hard graft, dedication and not a little skill to achieve the splendid end result, our wonderful clubroom.

But as the project neared completion, as the Hon Sec with my ear to the ground I became very much aware that many of the Castle Inn members were totally opposed to any move from their favourite watering-hole and had their own agenda. Indeed, some even argued that only Castle Inn regulars should be eligible for membership! So I contacted Alec in Edinburgh who at my request wrote an impassioned plea confirming that the clubroom project had always been his personal ambition and that the future of the Club depended upon it. Those of you who don't know this will be astonished to learn that after our countless hours of dedicated hard graft, at the crucial committee meeting (held at the clubroom) the move there was only sanctioned on the casting vote of the President, who voted as he did only out of loyalty to Alec and who subsequently returned to the Castle and resigned! On such a fine thread was the future of this great Club assured.

So what was it that enabled the Club to progress from a group of pub regulars to the great mountaineering club it has proved to be for the last fantastic 50 years? I believe there are three principal reasons:

First, and most important of all, the quality of the many members who were attracted to the Club, coupled with the warm welcome always extended to them, not always the case in organizations happy with their existing membership and content with the status quo.

Secondly, the range of activities promoted by the Club in all aspects of climbing and general mountaineering experience, even an annual winter meet in The Lakes at which our young children were introduced to hill climbing. In these days of regular trips both at home and abroad it is perhaps difficult to appreciate just what the opportunities of enjoying the Club's away meets in particular meant to us. For us they were nothing less than the opportunities of a lifetime, a total inspiration.

Thirdly, the clubroom itself, which enabled us on a Thursday evening to plan all our activities in convivial surroundings and where we organized a whole range of events, including slide shows by members, talks and demonstrations on rope work, map and compass work, mountain safety, and much more, also photographic competitions, a number of them judged by our speaker tonight, for which thank you very much, Ian. And of course, the subsequent building of the climbing wall (memorably described as the only centrally heated climbing wall!) added a new dimension. In these days of electronic communication it may be difficult to appreciate that at that time regular personal contact at the clubroom was the vital ingredient, the essential factor which bound us all together. Nowadays, it's all very different, as we can and do keep in touch so easily in this electronic age.

The clubroom turned out to be everything Alec had envisaged and our activities and our membership increased enormously.

It's now a very long time since I was an active member, but to this day I remain very proud of our achievements in those early days, and the friends I made then have proved the friends of a lifetime, an inspiration not just to me but to my family. Sadly, many of us have, perhaps inevitably, suffered the huge loss of family and friends in recent years. In my case my son Andrew, my dear friends Bob and Mike (Bob Payne and Mike Anderson) and, more recently, my wife Norma. I'm absolutely delighted that both Anne and Jill are with us this evening to share in the celebration of the Club's anniversary, the Club which has meant so much to all of us here tonight. Thank you both for taking part.

All my three sons Andrew, John and Chris benefitted from their participation in Club events, and tonight I have my son Chris with me. At the risk of embarrassing him, I can tell you that at the age of only eight or nine he first-footed Striding Edge on a winter meet to The Lakes, the Edge a perfect snow arete without a mark on it, on a glorious day of sunshine under a clear blue sky; who at the age of ten climbed Ben Alligin with me (both the Munro summits and the Horns) from a yacht on Loch Torridon, and who at the age of thirteen was with me on my final Munro on a bitter cold autumn day in the Cairngorms, readily tackling the nine-mile walk in (and out again!) in addition to the mountain climb. I could regale you all evening with tales of the exploits of members, but I've already greatly exceeded my allotted time. It's now my very pleasant duty to thank Ian for his interest in our Club, in particular his stirring address which I know we have all greatly enjoyed. Thank you, Ian, and as a token of our gratitude I'm pleased to offer you a copy of "The Castle" book. It's worth £5, but you can have it for only £4.50! Thank you very much.

I also want to thank Sean, Andy and Vanda for making this an event fitting the occasion. The fantastic turnout tonight (116 in all) is an indication of the influence this great Club has had on all our lives, but it would never have happened had it not been for your sterling efforts. Thank you all very much indeed.

Finally, I invite you all to stand and join with me in a toast to "The next 50 years of the Castle Mountaineering Club". Thank you all for listening so patiently to the ramblings of an

old man, a man who has benefitted so greatly from the influence and activities of this great Club.>
Mike Jackson. 21st October 2017.