

A Club Tie for Pasqua Rosee

When next you find yourself in London in the neighborhood of the Royal Exchange, take a moment to turn off Cornhill into St. Michael's Alley. It's a bit tricky to find. If you see St. Peter's Alley you've gone too far. If you wander into Beehive Passage or Bulls' Head Passage you'd better go back to Cornhill and try again. But once you've found St. Michael's Alley you can hardly miss the solid Victorian pub called the Jamaica Wine House. It was here, just where the pub stands, that a social and cultural revolution was launched. As launchings go, as revolutions go, it was subdued. There were no mob scenes, no bombs, no raised voices. It just happened that on this spot, one day in 1652, a swarthy foreigner from Smyrna, a former house-servant with the unlikely name of Pasqua Rosee, opened London's first coffeehouse.

Pasqua Rosee's coffeehouse didn't last long. It was destroyed fourteen years later in the Great Fire of London. But his coffeehouse, and those that sprang up afterwards, by the scores and by the hundreds, changed the way that Englishmen interacted. Coffeehouses provided a setting for rational discourse; they encouraged good manners and civility; they influenced the world of commerce and how business was transacted; they brought together people from a variety of backgrounds who enjoyed conversation, ideas gracefully expressed, and dining in convivial proximity. Coffeehouses were, in short, the direct ancestors of clubs such as ours.

Medieval London remained virtually intact until 1666. It vanished in three days. The Great Fire of London that began on September 2, 1666, destroyed 400 acres inside the city walls and 63 acres outside the walls. It destroyed 87 churches, including that ancient landmark, the city's pride, St. Paul's Cathedral; it destroyed the Royal Exchange, effectively wiping out the heart of London's commerce; it destroyed the meeting places of 44 craft guilds and 13,200 dwellings. Amazingly enough, only nine people died, but a vast population found itself homeless - a huge army of refugees was forced to camp out in the fields just north of the city.

The medieval rabbit warren of twisty streets, narrow alleys, dark passages and courtyards, was gone. In its place lay a huge area, the better part of a square mile, covered with rubble. Hardly had the last smoking embers been

extinguished than some men of formidable talent, including Christopher Wren and John Evelyn, set about designing a new London. In their view, the fire, for all its devastation, provided a remarkable opportunity to rebuild on a scale and with a magnificence that would proclaim England's supremacy in Europe. All proposals for rebuilding called for replacing the former medieval hodgepodge with a rational urban plan: a grid of broad avenues, public squares, and riverside walks. At the principal intersections, splendid new buildings would provide focal points: a new Exchange, a new Guildhall, new halls for the craft companies, new churches, and as centerpiece for the whole, a new St. Paul's Cathedral on the site of the old. The destroyed cathedral, it should be noted, dated back to Norman days. It boasted the highest spire in the world, it stood longer and broader than the present cathedral, and it had dominated London's skyline for more than four hundred years.

Alas for these ambitious plans. The problems posed by property ownership, eminent domain, and equitable compensation, proved so convoluted that the plan was first modified, then further modified, and at last abandoned as unworkable. London's displaced people had no patience with urban renewal. They just wanted to go home - back to their own plots of ground - and to rebuild their houses and shops exactly where they had been before the fire. And this, as it turned out, is what happened. London was reconstructed in a remarkably short time, but for the most part the new city was rebuilt on the medieval plan of the old. The main difference lay in the building materials: buildings that formerly were wood and plaster, now were made of brick and stone.

So what has all this to do with Pasqua Rosee and coffeehouses? Quite a lot, as it happens. The fact that the new City was rebuilt on the same plan meant that urban domestic squalor was perpetuated. There had never been enough housing, and there was still not enough. Tenements were packed from basement to attic with the poor: large families and sometimes several large families occupied a single room. Shrieking babies, the smoke and stench of cooking, inadequate water for washing filthy clothes and filthy bodies, lice, bedbugs, rats, nowhere to put things, a total absence of privacy, chamber pots reeking in corners, bone-chilling cold in winter - such was domestic life for the poor city dweller. Professional families fared only slightly better. They, too, accepted bugs,

stench, and the lack of sanitation. Houses were small, and even a moderately prosperous government official like the diarist Samuel Pepys, lived cheek by jowl with his servants and was regularly combed for lice.

For the poor, the main escape from the hopelessness of domestic life was to be found in gin shops. For the better off, it was in taverns and alehouses, for in those days gin was cheaper than beer. Both taverns and gin shops provided an alternative to the squalor of home. They provided a warm fire, an endless supply of cheap alcohol, and neighbors to complain with and to get drunk with. Then Pasqua Rosee opened a shop that sold a hot, bitter, black drink that, instead of debilitating those who drank it, energized them. I certainly don't mean to suggest that coffee cured the rampant alcoholism of the day, because, in fact, alcohol dependence increased over the next hundred years, reaching epidemic proportions by the mid 18th century. But coffee did provide an alternative, and the shops where it was sold offered to all comers a welcoming atmosphere that encouraged sociability and conversation. No such gathering places had existed before.

Coffee was not an instant hit. It had not trickled gently westward from Turkey into Europe. On the contrary, it jumped from Turkey to London in one gigantic leap. Unknown in Vienna, unknown in Rome, unknown in Paris, coffee just suddenly appeared. One day it didn't exist in Europe, the next day Pasqua Rosee was selling it in St. Michael's Alley. Rosee's employer, we are told, had brought him from Smyrna as a house servant, then had turned him loose, for whatever reason. Unemployed, in a foreign city, Rosee did what came naturally to a Turk: he brewed up a pot of coffee - presumably from his own private stash of coffee beans. Since the Near Eastern world liked it, in fact was addicted to it, Rosee hoped he could tempt at least a few Englishmen to acquire a taste for it.

Initially, Londoners, ever distrustful of things foreign, found the black drink repulsive. As one contemporary put it: who could like a drink that "looked like soot, smelled like shit, and tasted like old shoes?" But gradually Londoners got over their revulsion, and before long copy-cat establishments began serving it. In 1663, a mere ten years after Rosee opened up for business, eighty-two competitors were selling coffee in his immediate neighborhood. Then came the Fire and the rebuilding of the City. During and after the reconstruction more and

more coffeehouses opened, most of them in the streets around the Royal Exchange, London's commercial hub. But later, as the metropolis pushed westward, other coffee shops sprang up along Fleet Street and the Strand, London's main east-west thoroughfares. Finally, in the mid- 18th Century, with the removal of the newly prosperous still further west, coffeehouses began opening in the fashionable residential area around St. James's Palace. By 1750 when London's population had climbed to 650,000 its coffeehouses numbered between four and five hundred. But, again, (and the point must be stressed) we mustn't suppose that coffee ever supplanted alcohol. Far from it. Statistics show that in mid-18th century London for every one coffeehouse there were sixteen gin shops.

What accounts for the sudden popularity of the coffeehouse? For starters, they, too, like gin shops, provided a convivial place to go that wasn't home. But, unlike taverns and gin shops, they provided conviviality without drunken tumult. In fact, some coffeehouses served alcohol as well as coffee, but all of them made clear that drunks and rowdies were not welcome. Furthermore, coffeehouses, unlike taverns, were a male preserve. Although some were owned by women, and many of them employed waitresses, women customers were not permitted.

This new kind of public environment, high on caffeine, but free of drunkenness, turned out to be an environment highly conducive to talk - not just random talk, but serious talk and the exchange of ideas. Never before had so many Englishmen talked so earnestly to one another as did the men in 17th and 18th century coffeehouses. What's yet more surprising, they talked to strangers and to persons outside their own class, for it was an unwritten rule that customers sat where they pleased, and talked with all and sundry without the formality of introductions. In a society that has always been inordinately class conscious, this spontaneous acceptance of democratic intercourse was a remarkable social phenomenon. As Samuel Butler wrote as early as 1669, the coffeehouse "admits of no distinction of persons, but gentleman, mechanic, lord and scoundrel mix, and are all of a piece."

Although newspapers weren't to be found in gin shops or alehouses, coffeehouses were awash in newsprint. The larger establishments prided themselves on the number of papers, journals and broadsheets they had on hand, and the customers read them to tatters. Literacy at that early date was

surprisingly widespread. By the third quarter of the 17th Century fully forty percent of English males were literate (1). The percentage was probably higher in urban areas, and higher still in London. As they came through the front door, customers often announced their arrival by calling out "What news?" and there were always those who were glad to enlighten them. Because of the free exchange of news in an environment that was no respecter of class, coffeehouses came to be identified with liberal thinking. As early as the 1660s, Charles II claimed that these upstart meeting places with their democratic ways posed a threat to law and order, and, by extension, to the throne itself. He tried to suppress them, but his efforts only encouraged the opening of more. From England, coffee drinking spread overseas, not at first across the Channel, as one might expect, but across the Atlantic Ocean. Boston, Massachusetts, got a coffeehouse in 1670. Remarkable as it may seem, Bostonians were drinking coffee before the Parisians or the Viennese.

Spoil sports and moralists, ever ready to condemn pleasure, were quick to excoriate coffee and those who drank it. What's more, they had it on good authority that God disliked coffee, and neither sugar nor cream could make it acceptable in his sight. According to some churchmen, so great was God's opposition to coffee drinking that He came down from heaven and set the Great Fire of London. Because coffee was imported from the luxurious East, all manner of lewdness and depravity were attributed to it. In some quarters it was thought that coffee caused the licentiousness of the Restoration court. In others quarters it was blamed for the opposite. Witness the bad tempered women who petitioned the government to ban coffee, not because they were excluded from coffeehouses, or because coffee was making their husbands too ardent, but on the grounds that it was turning their husbands into wimps, predicting that if the practice was not halted "the offspring of our mighty ancestors will dwindle into a succession of apes and pigmies."

But still the controversy raged. A full century later, (when ladies first began preparing coffee at home) the French Dr. Bienville claimed that coffee stimulated what he called the "tumultuous workings" of the female imagination, and this in turn led to nymphomania. Some moralists were inveighing against it as late as the 19th century. A German scholar, Samuel Hahnemann, contended that "the

monster of nature, that hollow-eyed ghost, onanism, is generally concealed behind the coffee table." (2). Yet despite the fulminations of cranks, coffeehouses kept opening up.

But where, it is fair to ask, does that quintessentially English institution "a nice cup of tea" fit into the picture? Compared to coffee, tea was a late-comer. When Pasqua Rosee first went into business, tea was virtually unknown in London. Five years later Samuel Pepys, an up and coming young man eager to try out new things, was offered "a cupp of tee (a china drink) of which I never had drank before." Tea was slow to catch on. In 1700 when coffee was available on virtually every corner, tea was still an expensive rarity. In 1750, almost a century after Pasqua Rosee, tea was being served by fashionable ladies, but always in the privacy of their own drawing rooms. At last, in the 1760s, the East India Company began importing tea in large quantities. Its price came down, men started drinking it, and in time tea caught up with and overtook coffee as England's beverage of choice. A third non-intoxicating drink, hot chocolate, appeared at about the same time as coffee, and could be ordered at most coffeehouses. Those who couldn't afford coffee, tea, or chocolate drank saloop, an infusion of sassafras, milk and sugar that was hot, non intoxicating, and could be bought at outdoor stalls for a penny and a half.

As more and more coffeehouses opened, and competition increased, some proprietors tried to attract custom by staging what might be called "special events." On specified days a doctor might be on hand to bleed, to cup, or to sell pills. On other days the worms that were thought to cause toothache were dealt with, or should the worms prove elusive, the teeth they lived in were extracted. At the Union Coffeehouse in Cornhill, one could consult for a brief time in 1779, a charlatan who for ten guineas, could teach you a sure way to win the lottery. (3). Other coffeehouses attracted customers by exhibiting freaks. At the King's Head in West Smithfield you could see "a little Scotch Man ... two Foot and six Inches high ... near upon 60 years of age"(4). And if you happened to be at the Globe Tavern and Coffeehouse in early August, 1788, you could see Lythophagus the Stone-Eater, who "cracked flints between his teeth like nuts and then gnawed, crunched, and reduced them to the smallest pieces."(5). When the theaters let out each night into the disorderly streets around Covent Garden, the neighboring

coffeehouses would be packed. After several strong coffees, some theater-goers (unwilling to call it a night) might adjourn to one of the nearby Turkish baths (called "hummums") which offered not only a good sweat but Near-eastern ladies with cockney accents who promised a night of Turkish delights. Thus the coffeehouses in the area, their own respectability unsullied, profited substantially from the proximity of disreputable neighbors.

At Garraway's coffeehouse and the Rainbow, auctions were held almost daily. Mr. Christie, auctioneer, conducted high-end sales, disposing of country estates, freeholds and leaseholds, shares in business enterprises, and similar substantial properties.(6). Auctions for less pricey commodities were also held, but were not usually conducted by Mr. Christie. Sugar, indigo, timber, textiles, and spices came under the hammer, as well as second string merchandise, such as damaged rice, and other salvaged goods.

In an advertisement reminiscent more of Charleston or Savannah than of London, the *Daily Advertiser* ran the following notice in 1744: "to be sold - a pretty little Negro boy about nine years old and well limbd. If not disposed of is to be sent to the West Indies in six days time. He is to be seen at the Dolphin Tavern [and Coffeehouse] in Tower Street."(7). It is unlikely that the child would, in fact, have been sent to the West Indies. Attractive black children, especially boys, were highly prized as personal servants to ladies of fashion. However, as soon as they began to grow up and lose their cuteness they were usually turned out on the street to fend for themselves. Black adolescents who had seen service in well-to-do households often found employment in coffeehouses as waiters. Dark-skinned youths reinforced the exotic atmosphere that many coffeehouses chose to project - especially those that did business under such names as "The Turk's Head," "The Black Boy," or "The Blackamoor." It should be remembered that in England the status of slaves remained ambiguous until as late as 1772, when Lord Mansfield set the matter to rest by pronouncing that as soon as a slave set foot on English soil he or she became free.

If a visitor wandered out of the center of town and found himself in the village of Chelsea, Don Saltero's Coffeehouse was a must-see. Don Saltero, a showman who began life as plain James Salter, attracted customers by his cabinet of curiosities. Here, you could see a necklace made out of Job's tears.

Queen Elizabeth's chambermaid's hat, manna from heaven, and the very rope that bound our Lord to the pillar when he was scourged. When Benjamin Franklin was in London working as a journeyman printer he went to Don Saltero's to see the marvels. He evidently found the experience invigorating because afterwards, he tells us, he jumped into the river and swam from Chelsea all the way back to Blackfriars, frolicking and doing tricks in the water along the way. In time Don Saltero's exhibits became so shop-worn that they were put on the block for what they would fetch - which wasn't much. His early success, of course, encouraged those who thought they could beat him at his own game. The Royal Swan in Kingsland Road set up a rival display, a museum exhibiting no less than five hundred curiosities, the most wonderful, to my mind, being Adam's key to the front and back door of the Garden of Eden. Another establishment attracted custom by exhibiting what must be the ultimate religious relic: "God's Coat."

Edward Lloyd's coffeehouse, in business as early as 1678, attracted City merchants. News from the docks announcing the arrival of ships from distant ports always came first to Lloyd's. There it was read aloud, then posted on the notice board, and in due course was printed in what came to be known as "Lloyd's List." Lloyd's became the central clearing house for shipping news, foreign consignments, and by logical extension, for marine insurance. In 1773, those merchants, underwriters and brokers who had come to use Lloyd's coffeehouse less as a place of refreshment than as a place of business, arranged for the coffeehouse to be closed to those not in the trade. No longer a public house, Lloyd's thereafter was open only to those who paid a subscription - who, in other words, became members. Thus, by the end of the 18th century, Lloyd's coffeehouse was well on its way to becoming Lloyd's of London, the world's greatest marine insurers, where even today, in a quaint survival, its porters are referred to as "waiters."

In due course groups of men who shared interests found themselves meeting at particular coffeehouses on a regular basis. They began calling themselves "clubs," a newly-coined word in its nominative form. Heretofore the word existed only as a verb, "to club," meaning to share expenses, or as we would say, "to go Dutch." Clergymen tended to gather at Truby's coffeehouse; soldiers swapped war stories at Old Man's or Young Man's near Charing Cross;

Whigs damned the Tones at the Smyrna coffeehouse, and Tones damned the Whigs at the Cocoa-tree; lawyers talked earnestly at Nando's or the Grecian. Dryden brought the literary crowd to Will's coffeehouse, and after his death, Addison attracted the same crowd to Button's. Indeed, Addison and Steele's essays in the *Tattler* and the *Spectator* often took as their themes topics being debated in the coffeehouses. In the same essays they addressed public behavior, deploring the crudeness, the drunkenness of the bad old days, and commending the gentler manners, the public civility that in coffeehouses, at least, seemed to be gaining acceptance.

But we mustn't suppose that the shared interests that brought men together into clubs were invariably serious and cerebral. There were plenty of yahoos and rowdies in 18th Century London, and many of them formed clubs dedicated to nothing more uplifting than boozing, whoring, brawling, and general hell-raising - witness the notorious Hellfire club. Clubs of this kind, it is fair to say, usually met at taverns, not coffeehouses.

Then, of course, there were gambling clubs. In the newly fashionable West End, where the rich gravitated, coffeehouses opened that were designed to provide facilities for a well-heeled gambling clientele. These establishments, at good addresses and luxuriously furnished, dispensed both spirits and coffee. Some high rollers relied heavily on alcoholic courage, while others kept their cool with caffeine. Etiquette demanded that win or lose, a player remain impassive. An ungentlemanly display of emotion meant banishment from the table and sometimes the admonition never to return. We read of family estates being lost on a single throw, of enormous sums being placed on ridiculous wagers. These men came from a world of big money and social privilege; they took their gambling seriously, and they preferred gambling with persons of their own kind. As a way of gaining control over who was and who was not admitted, the members of certain gambling clubs (following perhaps the example set by Lloyd's) bought out the coffeehouses where they met. Thus, what was formerly a public establishment became a private club that could be as exclusive as its members wanted it to be. A newly-formed, private club usually kept the name of the coffeehouse it had bought out, but typically replaced the building with something far grander. White's, Boodles, Arthur's and Brooks's, in the area

around St. James's, are still in existence after 200 years, but now they are primarily social clubs, not gambling clubs.

Although clubs were generally associated with the coffeehouses in which they met, they were certainly not tied to them. Clubs existed independently and often proved more durable than the coffeehouses that provided them hospitality. Coffeehouses opened and closed, they went broke, burned down, changed hands, or simply failed. When this happened a club upped stakes and moved somewhere else without a backward glance. Dr. Johnson's Literary Club, for example, moved in its first hundred years to five different coffeehouses, and finally to a hotel.

I trust I will not be repeating a story that is already well known, if I turn briefly to Dr. Samuel Johnson's club. Johnson, (whose likeness hangs on the west wall on the upper level of this room) suffered for most of his life from episodes of depression. Shortly after the publication of his monumental *Dictionary of the English Language* he lapsed into a state of debilitating melancholy. Alarmed at his condition, his close friend, Sir Joshua Reynolds, suggested forming a club made up of a few of Johnson's closest friends. Its purpose: to give Johnson a once-a-week opportunity to shine. Johnson loved to talk; he did it well; and he relished the give and take of a spirited exchange. "Give and take" may not be strictly accurate, for when Johnson was on a roll it was mostly "give." But so apt were his remarks, so extraordinary the breadth of his knowledge, that his friends seem not to mind when he contradicted them, challenged them, or bulldozed them into silence. And so in 1764, the original nine members of "The Club" (not till later called the Literary Club") met for the first time at the Turk's Head coffeehouse for supper and conversation. Johnson's usual beverage, by the way, was not coffee or spirits, but lemonade, and as you may have noticed, the tradition of lemonade is maintained in these rooms too, whether by accident or design I do not know.

The original members, besides Johnson and Reynolds, were Edmund Burke and his father-in-law Dr. Christopher Nugent, Oliver Goldsmith, Sir John Hawkins, the Huguenot banker Anthony Chamier, and Johnson's two unlikely young friends Topham Beauclerk and Bennet Langden (both in their early twenties). Beauclerk, the great-grandson of Charles II and Nell Gwyn, moved

with the high-steppers. Langden, on the other hand, was a serious-minded intellectual. Alarmingly skinny, he stood six foot four and looked, it was said, like a stork on one leg. The two young men, totally different in temperament, but united in their devotion to Johnson, became close friends. It was to Bennet Langden that Dr. Johnson remarked, during a ramble through the country, that he had not rolled down a hill in a long time. Whereupon, there being a steep hill just before them, "taking out of his lesser pockets whatever might be in them ... keys, pencil, purse or penknife, and laying himself parallel with the edge of the hill, he actually descended, turning himself over and over till he came to the bottom"(8). I would like to have seen that spectacle. Of the original members of the club, only Sir John Hawkins turned out to be a mistake. Quarrelsome and tight-fisted, he made scenes over the cost of the suppers, and withdrew from the club early on, to the relief of the other members.

There was an old woman went up in a basket,
Seventy times as high as the moon.
And where she was going I could not but ask it,
For under her arm she carried a broom.
Old woman, old woman, old woman, quoth I,
Whither, oh whither, oh whither so high?
To sweep the cobwebs out of the sky
But Ill be back again, by and by.

It's lovely to think that that familiar nursery rhyme, so much a part of my childhood, and perhaps of yours, was a source of social solace to the great Oliver Goldsmith - a party-turn urged on him by Dr. Johnson in an effort to make the poor man relax and enjoy himself. He died, age 44, quite without funds, and it was his friends at the Club who paid for his monument in Westminster Abbey.

During the 1770s the club grew larger and attracted many men of distinction: David Garrick, Edward Gibbon, the great musician Charles Burney (the father of Fanny Burney), Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Charles James Fox, Adam Smith, and of course James Boswell. Johnson deplored the expanding membership, fearing his club was becoming, as he put it, "a mere miscellaneous

collection of conspicuous men” But he need not have worried. It was still highly selective. The Bishop of St. Asaph on the night he was elected to membership, noted (with some satisfaction) that on that same night the Bishop of Chester was blackballed, and so was Lord Camden.

The club continued to be known simply as "The Club" until 1779, when for the first time, at David Garrick's funeral, it was referred to as "The Literary Club." In a short time that became its official name. Dr. Johnson died in 1784, but the Literary Club lived on, prospering despite its lack of a permanent home. The Turk's Head coffeehouse. Prince's coffeehouse, Thomas's coffeehouse, Parsloe's coffeehouse, the Thatched House, and finally the Clarendon Hotel in Bond Street, each in succession offered it hospitality. In September, 1864, the Literary Club, its name changed once again, this time to the Johnson Club, celebrated its 100th birthday. And there we will leave it, though the club is, I believe, still very much in existence.

As recently as the third of last February the *New York Times* printed a column by Stacy Schiff, a guest columnist, who suggested that the reason we are all so hyper nowadays, so wired, so productive, is because we drink so much coffee. "The coffeehouse," she writes, "comes down to us with an illustrious intellectual heritage. It supplied Adam Smith and d'Alembert with office addresses. Coffee was Beethoven and Voltaire's primary source of nourishment. Samuel Johnson was a 40-cup a day man." "Caffeine sparks imagination, stimulates conversation, accelerates thought, enhances mood, increases endurance and activates memory. It allows us to beat the clock; how anyone managed to build a cathedral before the advent of espresso is beyond me." In the 18th century "it was said that no seamstress as much as threaded her needle without her morning coffee." But nowadays "you haven't had enough coffee until you can thread a sewing machine while it's running." This, I repeat, comes from the *New York Times*, of last February.

Do all coffeehouses, Java Joe's, Peet's, and Starbuck's - do they all descend from that little stall in St. Michael's Alley? Do all the world's clubs hark back to that hard-to-find turning just off Cornhill? Does it all, in fact, go back to Pasqua Rosee? If so, that enterprising Turk has enjoyed precious little recognition. He deserves better. Why shouldn't we Literarians take the lead by

awarding him one of our new club ties? And while we're at it, how about throwing in one of our coffee mugs - the one with the club's name and motto on the side? After all, he kept the pot perking even when people said his coffee, tasted like old shoes.

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7. Ibid, # 693.
8. Lane, p. 166.