

PLAYING PLACE SNOOKER CLUB

1946 - 2012





The Very Beginning

The men of the local Home Guard pictured on what is now the Playing Place Snooker Club car park. Their headquarters was a Nissen Hut brought from Falmouth early in the Second World War. On one occasion the hut was in danger of burning down but it survived the war years to become the Playing Place Men's Institute. The photograph includes at least one founder member of the institute.

'The Hut', as it was known: Billiards and snooker were played here for over thirty years. The four windows and rear door were blocked up in the 1960s. On the right the Ladies' Hut can be seen.





Early Days

This is a rare photograph of the young community growing up in and around Playing Place just after the Second World War. It was taken in 1946 at a Christmas party in the Nissen Hut which had been headquarters of the local Home Guard and was to become Playing Place Men's Institute. A number of those in the picture still live in the area.

A committee of men and women met in the hut in 1946 with the idea of raising money for a community centre. A few months later they decided they were unable to use the hut jointly and, in view of the 'prior right' of the men, a Men's Institute was formed. A small snooker table was purchased, which still left room for social events to continue. There were children's parties, folk dancing and whist drives. A weekly youth club was discontinued in 1948 because of damage caused by members.

In 1952 the committee bought a table tennis table, apparently not a new one, as it had to be treated for woodworm. It seems that interest in table tennis was short-lived, for soon a second snooker table was purchased, which meant there was little room for any activities other than snooker and billiards.

The 1950s saw a second 'hut' erected beside the Men's Institute. This served as the Ladies' Social Club. Later in the decade a Friday evening table tennis club was started in the Ladies'

Hut, as it became known. In time this became a more general youth club which eventually saw the development of the youth centre, now the community centre.

In the early days of the Men's Institute it was never easy to keep snooker tables in good order. Steam rose in clouds when tables were being ironed, especially in wet weather. In the 1960s the windows and rear door of the Nissen Hut were blocked up to combat the cold and damp, and chipboard flooring was laid around the match table.

The land on which the club stands, together with the land containing the Community Centre and the children's playground, is owned by Kea Parish Council, given by Cmdr. Bernard Penrose of Killiow in 1953. The deed of gift stated that any building on the site should be for the recreation of residents of Playing Place and those living within a distance of a mile.

Even after that date there was discussion about the land reverting to Killiow if the huts ever fell into disuse and, for some reason, in 1956 the committee was told that 'notice to quit the land' had been received by the Parish Council from Killiow's solicitors. Looking back, the club has good reason to be grateful to the committee for the decision they took that night. After discussion "*it was agreed to ignore the letter.*"

No lease has ever been drawn up between the Parish Council and the club, but the club has benefited greatly from the generous grants and other support it has received from the council over the years.

Moving on

The 1970s saw an upsurge of interest in the club, and, as membership grew, there was talk of replacing the hut with something better—it was certainly needed. One visiting player refused to continue with a match because of the cold. He left the club complaining that he could never play snooker with his donkey jacket on! The match was re-arranged on neutral territory at Devoran.

However, the damp and cold were not the only problems—there was a real need for more space. Members had to sit waiting for games on the one full-sized table, and a growing number of matches had to be accommodated. Monday 'club nights' became quite crowded affairs, with some members playing snooker and almost as many playing cards around a small table in the corner. As popular as it was at the time, with several members turning up just to play cards, this was never continued when the new club opened. In fact, the whole concept of a Monday 'club night' died with the old hut and could never be revived despite a number of attempts.

The notion of building a new clubhouse gathered momentum and the subject first appeared in club minutes in March 1977. A few months later the committee had to decide whether to join the Ladies' Social Club in a project to build a combined snooker room and village hall or to 'go it alone'. The unanimous decision was to 'go it alone'.

Raising money for the new club included a sponsored walk at Kea School, a summer fair at Perranwell Village Hall, dances at Perranwell and Tresillian, and jumble sales. There were at least two garden fetes in the grounds of Killiow. The first of these attracted a great response, as the gardens were not often opened to the public at around that time. Much of the hard work in planning the events was done by committee meetings at the Punchbowl!



Money-raising at Killiow



Money-raising efforts received a boost when money held in trust after the closure of the Ladies' Social Club was released by Kea Parish Council. It was a condition that this money, which had grown to more than £700, could only be put towards building a toilet block. The toilets were therefore positioned in such a way that they could be shared with any future community building placed beside the new club. (At the time there were still suggestions that another hall might be needed to replace the Ladies' Hut.) A lintel was built into the wall of the entrance hall in case a double door should ever be needed into a new building.

TRUST MONEY FREED TO BUILD A TOILET BLOCK

MEMBERS of Playing Place Men's Institute now have the use of about £700 to build a toilet block adjoining their new rooms.

Good news!

The chairman of the institute, Mr. Davey, told Kea Parish Council that £400 was raised by the now defunct Playing Place Ladies' Social Club. The total was now £700.

The money had been put aside and could be used only for the building of a toilet block with community rooms at Playing

Place. The assent of the parish council was needed before the money could be released.

Mr. Davey said: "We have said if we could use the money we should provide a toilet block with it in such a way that it could be used by other organisations that use our building."

"We are just starting building and the release of this money would make it quicker for us to complete."

He said the former organiser of the ladies' social club committee, Mrs. Margaret Dunstan, had given her consent to the

money being used.

"Although the money is getting greater its buying power is much less today. We think the time could be right for it to be used," said Mr. Davey.

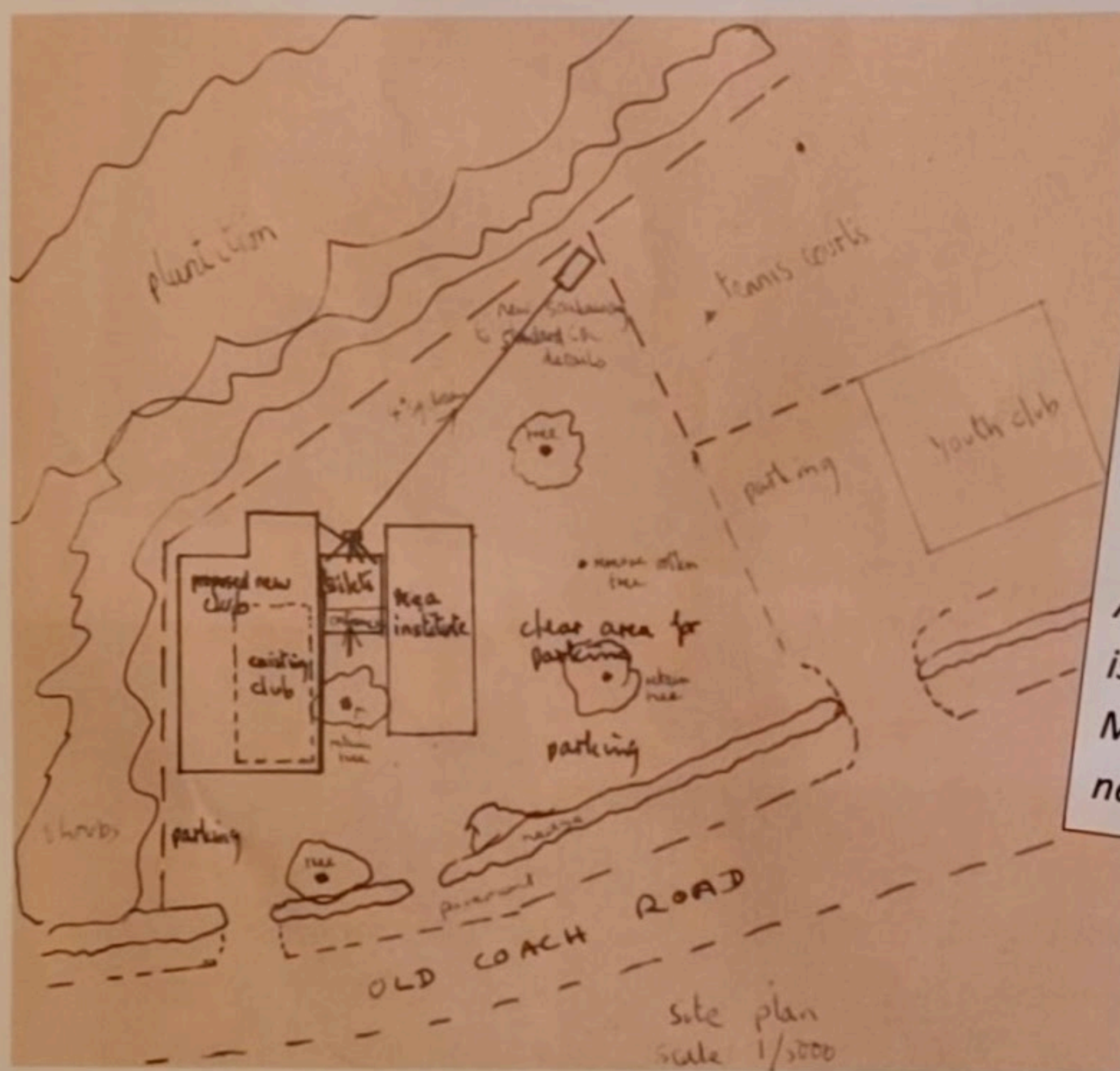
Mr. R. A. Edmond said it would be silly of the parish council to keep the money in trust any longer, and Mr. W. J. Wellingham said the institute ought to be able to use the money.

The council agreed to release the money and suggested that the premises should be made as vandal-proof as possible.

During the building phase the West Briton reported that the new institute would cost about £9000 and that fund-raising during the preceding few years had yielded about £4,500, including a grant of £1000 from Carrick Council. There was a further grant of £500 from Carrick as well as more than one grant from Kea Parish Council. Loans from club members helped the funds along and in 1981 a gift of £1000 was received from a former member who was moving into a rest home. Between April 1979 and December 1981 the club was able to spend £10,200 on building work.

The New Club

Most of the building work on the new club was carried out by members during weekends and evenings, with occasional help from paid professionals when required. In view of the time it would take to complete the building one major problem had to be overcome. How could members continue to play snooker while the work was going on? Well, the new building was erected around the Nissen Hut so that no league commitments were missed. Play was only disrupted for a brief period towards the end of the building phase when the snooker tables and the old hut were dismantled and removed.



A site plan showing the position of the old Ladies' Hut, which was used as a store for building materials and later demolished. It is marked as 'Kea Institute' on the drawing.

Also shown (dotted lines) is the position of the old Men's Institute inside the new building.

The block work for the building was nearly complete when the only serious accident of the project occurred. At the end of a Sunday morning's work two members were laying blocks at the top of the front gable. As they made an adjustment, the new block work collapsed, throwing them off the scaffolding on to the floor, with concrete blocks and scaffold boards falling around them. One of them suffered a broken leg and the other some serious bruising: those who witnessed the incident were amazed that their injuries were not worse.

The building well under way, with Playing Place Shop in the background.



Building as close as possible to the Ladies' Hut and in such a way that the new club could be easily joined to any future village hall on the site.

The old hut is still available for snooker but is gradually disappearing as the block work grows around it.





*More blocks
awaiting willing
workers at the
weekend.*

*The project was
only possible
because of the work
carried out by a
small band of
members giving up
their time at
weekends and in
the evenings.*



An internal feature of the building is the glazed mahogany screen separating the two main rooms. This came from Gweal-an-Top School, Redruth, which was undergoing alterations at the time. Fortunately, unlike many similar school screens, it had never been painted and only required a fresh coat of varnish. In transit to its new home not a single pane of glass was broken. The raised bench seating in the match room came from RNAS Culdrose.

Ready for play





Is your's the Cue Club of the year?



The snooker room in this picture might not seem to be all that unusual.

But the story behind it is a remarkable one of a group of players co-operating to overcome the normal odds . . .

For 30 years members of the Playing Place Men's Institute down in Truro, Cornwall, played in a Nissen Hut - a relic of the Dad's Army days of the Home Guard.

They needed a new headquarters and they did not want to stop playing . . . So they built their new three-table centre *OVER* the old hut.

*The new club
features in Pot
Black Magazine
1980-81. This is
an extract from
a longer item.*

When the building was complete all that remained was the demolition of the former Ladies' Social Club next door and the laying of the new car park. The appearance of the club has changed little over the past 30 years, though recently most of the windows have been boarded up because of vandalism, and new signs placed along the front.

One thing which has changed is the name of the club - from Playing Place Men's Institute to Playing Place Snooker Club at the AGM of 1993. This in turn paved the way for the club to open its doors to female members three years later.



DIVISION ONE	
Clinton Club	103
Redruth RBL A	103
Penponds*	92
Redruth Adult School	91
St Day	87
Playing Place	84
Godolphin	82
Carharrack	75
Leadstown	67
Peoples Palace*	66
Breage	66
Camborne RBL	64
Illogan	63
Redruth RBL B	58
*Match in hand	
DIVISION TWO	
Godolphin Club	112
Penponds	107
Churchfield	101
Four Lanes	88
Cam Brea	83
Camborne Cons Club A	77
Troon	77
Illogan	70
Green Baize	64
St Day	62
Stithians	61
Redruth Adult School	61
Camborne Cons Club B	58
St Agnes	58
Pool Bassett	57
DIVISION THREE	
Perranporth Golf Club	101
Breage	98
Park Bottom	87
Camborne Police	84
Redruth RBL	84
Redruth BR Club	83
Camborne RBL	79
Cam Brea	74
Stithians	73
Illogan	71
Green Baize	67
St Day	62
St Agnes	58
Pool Bassett	58
Illogan	54
DIVISION FOUR	
Clinton Club	107
Passmore Edwards (Hayle)	106
Penponds	104
Redruth Highway A	103
Playing Place	89
Illogan	86
Redruth Club	69
Troon	67
Camborne Cons Club	67
Park Bottom	66
Perranporth	62
St Day	60
Camborne Police	58
Lanner	56
Redruth Highway B	36

A strong Mining League 1989/90

In 1977/78 the club first appeared in the Falmouth and District Billiards League. Two years later a second team was formed and the club has been a regular part of the billiards scene ever since. Playing Place B won the billiards league in 1996/97 and 1998/99, a year in which they dropped only one point in a run of 14 matches. In the three following seasons they were runners-up. In 2007/08 Playing Place B won the billiards handicap league and the following year won the main billiards league again.

And so the club's association with the Falmouth league still continues after more than 40 years, though the number of clubs involved is sadly reduced.

Mining League

Playing Place first entered the Mining Division Snooker League in 1983/84, finishing runners-up to Godolphin Club in the fourth division. They progressed up the divisions and in 1988/89 were runners-up in a strong second division.

This prompted the club's Falmouth League and Mining League teams to join forces and enter the Mining League first division for the 1989/90 season. They finished sixth out of 14 teams and at the same time the club entered a new team in the fourth division. The strength

of the league at that time was such that, as well as a first division of 14 teams, there were three lower divisions each of 15 teams – a total of 59 teams! Apart from a few seasons when they dropped back to the second division, the A Team has been in the first division ever since. In 2011/12 they were joined for a season by the B Team who had won promotion from the second division.

Also, in a period when Cornish snooker boasted many quality players, Playing Place were one of the few clubs to compete every season in the three-man Cornwall Premier League which ran for 14 years from 1982 to 1996.

In 2005/06 the Devoran Club played its last season in the Falmouth League after a run of many years and sadly the club closed. A number of Devoran Players joined Playing Place, contributing to overall membership and increasing the number of players taking part in league snooker and billiards.

At present the club has three teams in the Mining League, one in each of the first, second and third divisions, as well as a snooker team and a billiards teams in the Falmouth and District League.

Over the years there have been a number of team and individual successes in county and league competitions. Members have won county individual competitions in both billiards and snooker and have also been selected to play for Cornwall in team events. In 1992 the club reached the final of the Plymouth-based Mayflower Handicap, going down 3-1 to Plaza Snooker at the Belgrave Club. From time to time members have also taken their turn as officers and committee members at league and county level.

League snooker and billiards have played an important part in the life of the club: two team members have clocked up 100 years' league snooker between them! There have been periods in relatively recent years when income has dipped to such a point that the regular commitment of team players has been a major factor in the club's survival. Fortunately, at the present time, both membership and finances are once more in a healthy state, with more members putting money through the meters than for a long time.

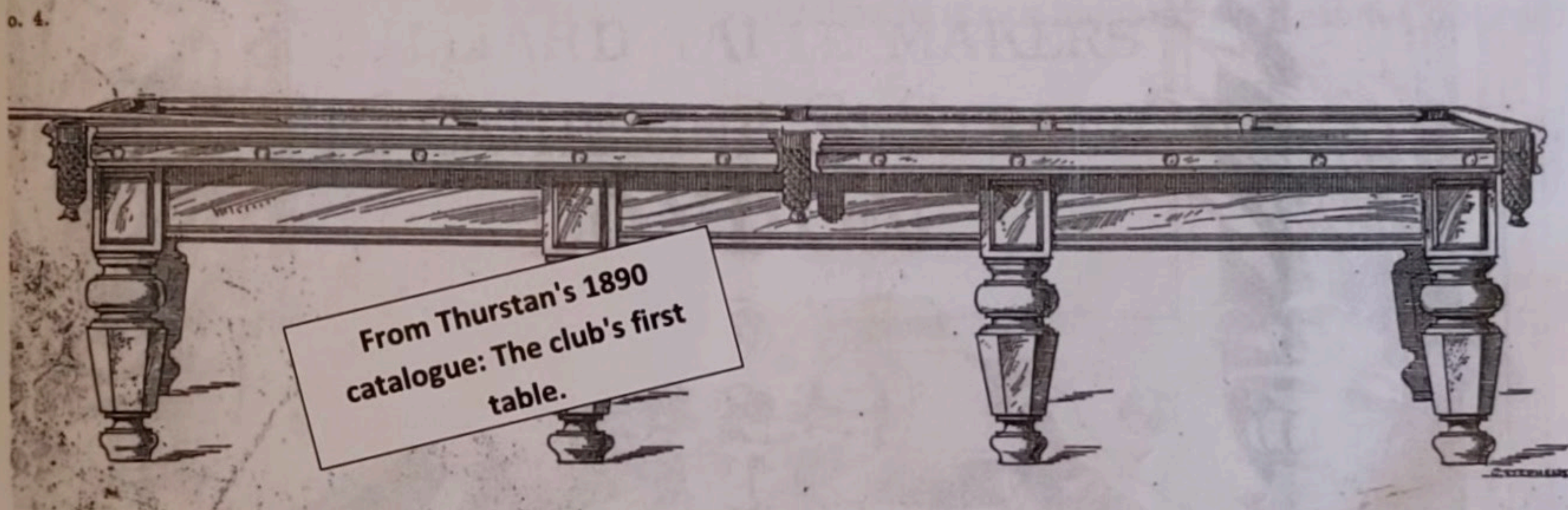


**April 2003 at Heamoor: Playing Place win
the Mining League second division and
return to the first division**

Tables

Snooker began in Playing Place on a small table (probably 8 feet by 4 feet) which was shortly followed by another slightly larger table always referred to as a 'three-quarter' table. In fact the dimensions were 10 feet by 5 feet. Both tables had slate beds and sets of full-sized balls with 10 reds.

The club bought its first full-sized table in 1959 for £25. It had come from the City Club, Truro, apparently a social club for Truro City Council employees, which had closed at some time previously. It was an Imperial Petrosian No.4 Table made by Thurston in the 1890s at a cost of 80 guineas. It had a bed of four slates, rather than the five slates of most modern tables, and octagonal 'threepenny-bit' legs. It was notoriously tight, especially along the rails. This, along with the cold and the damp conditions, caused the downfall of many visiting players. The purchase of the table enabled the club to play league snooker for the first time and it remained the match table until the new club was built 20 years later.



With the new club came a second table at a cost of £600. It was purchased from local league player Bernard Refson of Helford, and was brought back to the club by milk float. The table, which had previously come from the Falmouth Working Men's Club, now does service as the club's Number Two Table.



At around the same time, another table was bought from a furniture warehouse in Falmouth. This was installed as Number Three Table but sold again as soon as the opportunity arose.

On completion of the new building an oak table was bought from Graham Price of Bridgend, for many years the club's professional fitter. It served as the match table for about 20 years and is now Number Three table. At the time, table prices were high due to the popularity of the game, and good tables were hard to find. This one came from a fire-damaged building in South Wales. With transport, new scoreboard, a full set of equipment, and complete refurbishment, it cost more than £3000.

This was in complete contrast to the costs involved in obtaining the present match table, which came as something of a surprise to the club. It was offered free by the autism trust Spectrum when they were converting their 'Three Bridges' Centre at Blackwater in 2003. They needed someone who could dismantle the table and take it away quickly in order that the builders could finish on schedule. Again, a milk float was used to bring the table back to the club, where it was erected a year or so later.



A Sunday morning
at Blackwater



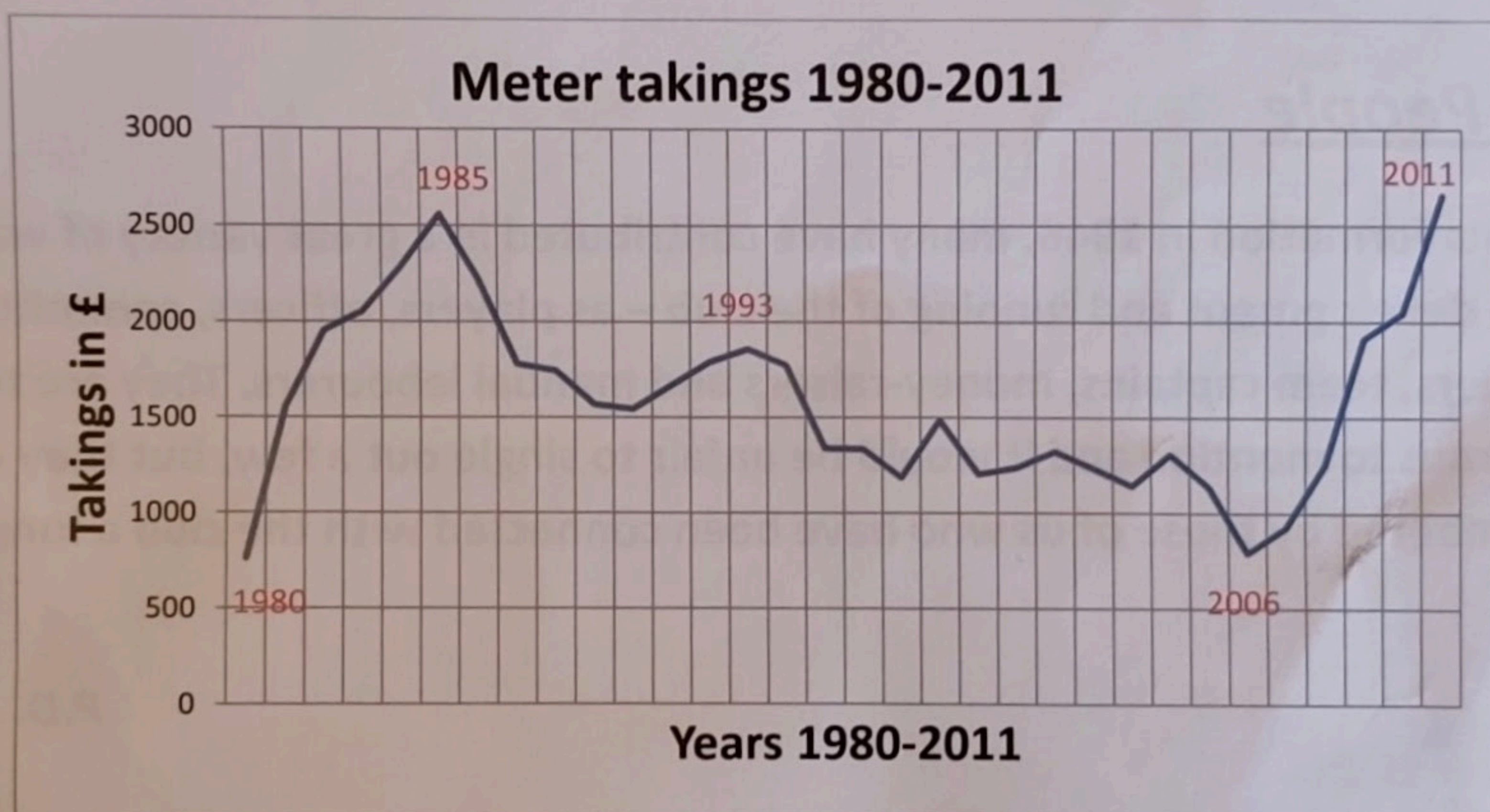
The table was made by the Willie Holt company of Burnley about 25 years ago. Although modern by comparison with other tables bought over the years, it is built very much on traditional lines and has been an asset to the club.



Ups and Downs

Money taken via the meters has been a good indicator of the general well-being of the club. Tables were at their busiest in the years following the opening of the new building and meter takings in 1983 topped the £2000 mark for the first time. Two years later they reached a peak of more than £2500 – and this, nearly 30 years ago, when meter charges were much lower than they are today. In that year the treasurer calculated that the match table was in use for an average of six hours per day throughout the year!

Amazingly, that 1985 figure was not overtaken for over 25 years -- until 2011 in fact, when more than £2600 was put through the meters. In the intervening years there was a gradual decline in the amount of snooker played at Playing Place, a trend prompting the chairman at the 1991 AGM to comment that "if the situation does not improve we will find it difficult to maintain our standards." A year later came a suggestion that the club should become a social club with a bar. And the question was asked, "How much longer will the club remain viable just for snooker?" The idea of the bar was shelved.



As the chart shows, there were worrying times more recently when meter takings dropped to below £1000 in two consecutive years, the low point being 2006 when less than £800 was taken. Fortunately, this situation has turned around and the club has seen something of a revival, with meter collections rising rapidly to £2600 in the five years to 2011.

Of course, meter takings in the early 1980s reflected the high membership at the time. Membership had risen from 61 in 1981 to a limit set by the committee of 90 in 1983. This limit was raised to 100 in 1985 and membership remained at 100 for the next two years. This seems to have been the peak, even though the actual limit was raised again to 110. By 1988 numbers had dropped to 97 and continued to fall away to about 70 in the mid-1990s.

Since that time the club has had between 50 and 60 members most years, the 2011 figure of 67 being the highest for at least 10 years. More importantly, though the membership is still not high by the standards of 30 years ago, a greater proportion of members are playing snooker again. Formerly, there were some who paid their subscriptions, perhaps out of loyalty, but only rarely visited the club.

The costs of running the club have increased dramatically, but in recent years, the committee has resisted raising the annual subscription which has been held at £26 since 2003. When the club was founded in 1946 the subscription was 10 shillings (50p) and it was not until 1966 that this was increased to £1. Ten years later it went to £2, in 1981 to £5, in 1983 to £7, in 1985 to £8, in 1986 to £10, in 1987 to £11, in 1990 to £15, in 1991 to £18, in 1996 to £20 and in 2002 to £25.

Over the years a decline in snooker and billiards has brought about the closure of a number of Cornish clubs. At present, membership and finances at Playing Place remain in good order. Long may this continue!

The People

Since its formation in 1946, many have contributed in a great variety of ways to the development and running of the club – as players, officers, committee members, team captains, money-raisers and manual labourers. They are too numerous to mention and it would be unfair to single out a few, but they are remembered by those of us who have been connected with the club a long time.

P.D. 2012