

*THE
MORWELL
CLUB*



"The Formative Years"



R.R. Davey, 1898 to 1978

FOREWORD

As early records by way of minute books and annual reports are non existent, I have been approached by members of the General Committee to see if I would be interested in compiling from memory our early days.

As a first step I have delved through many old records in the office and have managed to find sufficient material to be able to piece together a fairly composite picture of our beginning. Unfortunately many relevant details have been obviously lost forever. I have also discussed these matters with Keane Barry, who with myself, are now the only two remaining members who, were also members of the original Oyster Club.

Well established golf and bowling clubs and others with substantial memberships built up over many years and who wished to apply for a Liquor License, had a relatively easy road to travel to the Licensing Court. However for us to accomplish in the brief transitional period from what began as a casual conversation in a hotel bar, to forming a club, building up its membership to 200, purchasing three properties, erecting a club building, applying for and being granted a liquor license in just three years, was a notable achievement.

In that particular context it is an interesting story in itself. Prices quoted in £.s.d, are meaningless unless translated into the basic wage then and now. I will make comparisons whenever necessary. Old memories are always pleasant to recall, but are transient things that fade away in time. It is only the written history that survives.

FRANK BRYAN
November, 1991.

The Morwell Club was mentally conceived in the front bar of the Club Hotel late in 1953. It was the watering hole of Reginald Raglan Davey, a grazier, also mine and many others from every walk of life.

There were only two Hotels in Morwell at that time and no Licensed Clubs. The Club Hotel was owned by the McKay family, Murray, Stan and Ruby. A short distance further down Commercial Street was Murdoch's Hotel where Woolworths/Safeway are now situated, and owned by Dick Barry; father of Keane.

The new Morwell Open Cut was getting underway again after a period in mothballs and, with the population increasing rapidly, the small bars in these Hotels were no place to be between 5pm and the closing time of 6pm.

It was normal routine for Police to walk through the bars at 6pm to ensure barmen has stopped serving and by 6.15pm had to be evacuated. If this was difficult enough for most of us then spare a thought for shop employees and other business men who worked until 6pm.

There just had to be a better way and a Licensed Club was the answer. Reg Davey had some ideas along these lines and discussed them in the Club Hotel bar with friends. He then invited about fifteen to dinner in the Masonic Hall in Hazelwood Road, on a Friday night. He was a shareholder in Wollamba River Oyster Leases and ordered some from their depot in Melbourne, along with crayfish, to be sent to the Morwell Railway Station by morning passenger train. He then took them to the Masonic Hall, set up tables, chairs and everything else necessary by himself.

The menu was one dozen oysters, half a crayfish and one bottle of beer for a quid.

A Committee was formed and the first President was Reg Davey. The Club was aptly named "THE OYSTER CLUB" and would meet in the Masonic Hall, once a month.

The membership fee would be two £10 debentures with an initial deposit of £10, and a further £10 in three months. £20 in 1953 would now be over \$200 in 1991. Day one for the Morwell Club had begun.

As membership slowly increased some members requested that chicken be included on the menu so a caterer, George James was called in. He was shortly to join the club and was to be our caterer for many years.

At a later meeting it was decided to appoint a Treasurer. As we had three Bank Managers as members, competition was keen, for obvious reasons. It was decided to place the three names in a hat, Des Connell of the National Bank, Cecil Geirsch of the Bank of New South Wales and Herb Shellam of the A.N.Z. Bank. Cecil Geirsch's name was drawn out so the Bank of New South Wales, Westpac, became our first bankers.

Later on we decided to find a more appropriate name for the Club. Many names were suggested including "THE GENTLEMENS CLUB". Perhaps that term was a little ambitious and taking a long term view, what if the unthinkable happened and ladies were admitted as associate members?

We settled on a name to cover any eventuality "THE MORWELL CLUB".

At the end of 1954, Tom Lazarus was elected our second President and with John Ulysses Watt, a solicitor; between them drew up a most important document, our first Constitution.

In October 1954 Martin Brown, a Fireman at the A.P.M., Maryvale offered his home for sale at 129 Princes Highway, and we purchased it for £2,500. It was an old ironroofed weatherboard home and was to become our first Club. Work then commenced to convert it to our particular requirements. The major question that confronted us was how to encourage members to attend frequently and more importantly to entice new members to join.

Our solicitor John Watt along with others studied the Licensing Laws and decided to adopt what was to be termed "THE BOTTLE SYSTEM". To this end we built numerous wooden lockers just large enough to hold about one dozen bottles of beer, along the lounge room wall adjacent to the kitchen. One dozen was £1.15 at that time.

We moved into our first Club building in early 1955 and appointed Ernie Sagar as Manager. He was retired and living at Jeeralang Junction. The Club hours were to be from 4pm until 11pm.

We would sign an order form for either D.C. Mills, a Licensed Grocer or the Club Hotel for bottles required. Our manager would phone these orders through to the suppliers who had front door keys of the club and they would place these orders, together with the

account, in the numbered lockers in the afternoon. We were to pay the account directly to the suppliers. The large kitchen fridge would have ample supplies of cold bottles, ice blocks, soda etc., and after 4pm, the manager would simply exchange a cold bottle for a warm one. There were some minor problems even with this system, and on occasions the President had to remind some forgetful members that the suppliers were complaining that a few accounts were well overdue.

In order to justify our existence as a legitimate club we decided that we should promote ourselves as a sporting club, but at that time all we possessed in that direction was a dart board, hookey board, and a few packs of cards.

The preferred card game at that time was "SLIPPERY SAM" and the money wagered was not excessive. Ernie Sagar would eagerly join in and would stay long after closing time. It was inevitable that poker schools took over and rapidly grew in size with members bringing along friends and the amounts being wagered were becoming local gossip.

These poker schools were banned when a Police Sergeant quietly told our President that a housewife had phoned complaining that her husband had lost the housekeeping money in a poker school at the Morwell Club. With a visit to the Licensing Court envisaged this was publicity we could well do without. At least the Morwell public were now well aware we existed.

It was gratifying to have our own Club building, but this in turn brought along with it rising costs of a Manager's salary, land rates, legal fees and other incidentals which were only partially supplemented by special efforts, cigarettes sales and small profits on catering.

As liquidity was now becoming a problem it was decided to charge a joining fee of five guineas, an annual sub of four guineas and an annual fee of two pounds for a locker on top of the twenty pounds debenture. This was a total of thirty-one pounds nine shillings, which today in 1991 would be over three hundred dollars.

When members joined they were advised that although two ten pound debentures was all that was required to become members, they were pressed to take up as many more as they could afford and many obliged by taking up to five ten pound debentures. This generous response enabled us to purchase not only the Princes Highway Club well ahead of schedule, but also early in 1955 the present Club site in Helen Street for £685.4.9.

The future agenda had now been established and the guide lines set in place. When membership approached two hundred we would erect a small club building to cater for just that number with two options in mind.

If we obtained a License we would expand as funding became available, if not it could be sold and converted to a luxury home. In the event we failed to obtain a License, a special general meeting would be called and let members decide the future. Whether to sell all properties and refund all debentures in full, which with rising property values was never in doubt, or to hold on and re-apply at some future date.

Late in 1955 our membership figure was nearing the target so we approached a Collins Street, Melbourne based Architect "Robert S. Demaine & Associates" to design a building with these two specific options in mind.

Plans were approved, tenders called and on 29th March 1956 Local builders "Gordois & Brooks" signed a contract to erect the Club building for £5,381. We were to pay them an initial deposit of £2,300.

To pay this deposit we obtained an overdraft of £2,500 on the Princes Highway Club which by then had escalated to a sworn valuation of £4,033.

The Club was completed toward the end of 1956 and we moved into our present Club building in Helen Street. The Club consisted of a large lounge and to promote the sporting image a full sized billiard table was placed in the centre. There were also toilets, kitchen, store room, a small bar, and of course the lockers.

Mervyn Hare, a member, was appointed as Bar Manager and the hours 4pm until 11pm.

In early 1957 when membership reached 200 we applied for a Liquor License and received advice to attend the Licensing Court on a given date.

It was also revealed that on the same day, a consortium, which included our Treasurer Keane Barry were also applying for a Licensed Permit to erect a Hotel in the growing town of Newborough. The Morwell R.S.L. had also applied for a license on the same day.

In order to remove any suggestion of a conflict of interest by being involved in two License applications on the same day, Keane wisely decided to resign as Treasurer of our Club. We then consulted a solicitor who specialised in Licensing matters to appear for us at the Court hearing and he checked through the details of our first three years of existence. We were then shattered when he informed us that the "Bottle System", we had been innocently using was in actual fact a breach of our complex Licensing Laws.

The solicitor advised Rolf Kornbrekke to mention nothing about it at the court hearing. The light at the end of the tunnel was now looking a little dim. It was difficult to reconcile that after three years of voluntary work and planning and the winning post in sight, we may well fall at the final hurdle.

Up until this period Licensing Court judges were perceived to be more concerned with maintaining the status quo than handing out new licenses, particularly to an unknown fledgling Club like ours, with barely enough feathers to fly with.

However there was now a ray of hope with the recent installation of Judge Frazer as Chairman of the Licensing Court. He had travelled widely and noted a much more Liberal attitude to Licensing matters in major countries overseas.

Arriving back in Australia he publicly announced that he would also in future look at genuine applications in a more favourable light. He had a son Neal who played Davis Cup Tennis for Australia, and another son John, was a well known Doctor.

Judge Frazer was to hear our application and before leaving Rolf Kornbrekke promised he would inform us by phone of the result.

I was in the Club the following evening with the normal crowd of about ten. The phone rang about 5.30pm. Merv went to answer it; he came back smiling. Although Judge Frazer had somehow obtained information about our "Bottle System" and warned that it would never again be condoned, he granted us a Liquor License.

The consortium obtained a License to build a Hotel in Newborough, but the R.S.L. had failed because of a technical error in the wording of the application. They applied again at the next hearing and succeeded. It was now legal to knock the top off a bottle after 6pm; and we did just that.

The Licensee of Murdoch's Hotel, George Jordan, a member, generously loaned us the barrels, plutos, glasses and everything else necessary to get underway, and instructed the manager on all aspects of beer pulling. It would be convenient to say that now we had a License it was the end of the story, but that would be a long way from reality, for running a Club is a never ending story.

In anticipation of an influx of new members, we now needed a car park, and a larger Club building. To fund the car park the members were asked to purchase £10 land debentures. With this money we purchased two 67 feet blocks of vacant land opposite. This was the former site of Hutchinson and Pyle Saw Mill. The western block was much cheaper, as it was where the sawdust heap had been.

We extended the Club lounge eastwards to its present position and transferred the billiard table together with another into an enclosed Billiard room. George Jordan once again showed his generosity by loaning the club a substantial interest free sum of money to cover this expense.

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In summary it can be said without question that Reg Davey was the first of all the instigator and in subsequent years always a motivator in every aspect of Club development, and his name inscribed on the foundation stone is in its rightful and proper place. At the same time we were fortunate in having such a dedicated and knowledgeable Committee who included Company Directors, Bank Managers and a Solicitor. They accurately assessed the funding required to get us successfully to the Licensing Court, and it was their hands on the steering wheel for three years that guided us there.

Cynics at the time suggested that the steep membership fees were to keep out the working class, but in hindsight events proved that anything less may well have ended in failure.

Finance was always to be a major problem. Their first priority was always to ensure that members equity by way of debentures were safely invested in land. The rising population of Morwell and increasing property values was another welcome bonus.

After we became Licensed the progress was much slower than we anticipated as old habits die hard, and members still went to Hotels after work to drink with friends, and came to the Club later. In February 1966, 10pm closing for Hotels became law and this was a financial setback for us, but we had sufficiently consolidated by then to absorb this.

Ladies nights on Friday and Saturday nights were introduced in 1967, several times a year, but were not that successful. Changing the rules of our constitution to admit Lady associates was always a perennial topic and the Committee decided to test the feeling by calling a special general meeting of members on the 27th September 1971. They voted in favour of allowing associates to join.

In 1963 the West camp at Yallourn closed and we purchased two of their billiard tables for £45 each. In 1965 the new Billiard Room was completed and these two tables were added to the two existing ones. Number one table came from the Victorian Hotel in Korumburra and number two table, from Twomey's Hairdressing Saloon, opposite the Club Hotel.

In 1968 the car park opposite the Club was converted to a Bowling Green at a cost of \$20,000. It was officially opened on February 23rd, 1969.

The house on the west side of the Club was purchased and removed to become a car park, later still the next property was purchased and likewise converted into a car park.

In conclusion I must say that over the 38 years of our history, the members who have contributed to the progress of our Club in various ways are almost limitless. So although tempted numerous times I have purposely avoided mentioning names, except when necessary. I consider it would be unfair, even unwise to mention some names and omit others. I have applied the same reasoning to the numerous photographs we have in our possession.

MORWELL CLUB.

4 Billingsley Court,
MORWELL.

14th. December, 1955.

(THE CLUB WAS THEN ON THE PRINCES HIGHWAY)
F.B.

Mr. A. Willett,
C/o Sharpes Emporium,
Commercial Road,
MORWELL.

Dear Sir,

I have much pleasure in advising you that your application for membership to the above Club has been approved. On receipt of the necessary fees X you may avail yourself of the Club's facilities.

In this connection I would advise you that once in every four weeks we have a "dining in" night. A dinner of oysters, crayfish and chicken is served at 6.30.p.m., a charge of £1. being made to cover expenses.

The next dinner happens to be this Friday (16th. December) and should we be in receipt of your fees on or before that night, I suggest you endeavour to attend and meet your fellow members.

I shall myself be present that night and would have pleasure in acquainting you with the Club ^{rules} subscriptions and any other details.

Yours faithfully,



R. KORNBREKKE

HON. SECRETARY

X FEES

Joining Fees	£5. 5. --
Annual Subs.	4. 4. --
Locker Fees	2. -- --
Debentures	20. -- --
	<u>£31. 9. --</u>

Note re Debentures £10. must be paid on joining and the further £10. within three months.

MORWELL CLUB

Proposed Debenture Plan, issued 30th October, 1954

1,000 DEBENTURES WILL BE ISSUED OF £10 EACH

- Interest will be paid at the rate paid by the State Savings Bank of Victoria on 30th October, 1954, and interest payments will be made yearly on 31st October.
- One half of the amount of each debenture namely Five Pounds must be paid on application and the balance payable by yearly instalments of such amount as the Committee of the Club determines but the Committee may at any time call up the balance of debenture money for the following reasons:
 - The purchase and development of suitable Club premises
 - The development of licensed facilities.
- If for any other reason the Committee desires to call up the balance of debenture payments then it shall call a Special General Meeting of members of the Club who shall make a decision or recommendation upon the matter.
- If a member so desires he may pay up the full amount of each debenture on application or at any time prior to the moneys being called up by the Committee.
- Interest will be paid on all moneys paid in respect of debentures including moneys held in part payment thereof.
- Debenture certificates will only be issued upon completion of full payment of each debenture namely ten rounds.
- If default be made in payment of any instalment payable in respect of the debenture when called up by the Committee for a period of twenty one days after the due date then the person in default with the consent of the Committee of the Club may transfer his interest in the debenture to any person approved by and acceptable to the Committee but if such transfer shall not have been effected within ninety days of the date of default then all moneys paid to the Club in respect of that Debenture shall be forfeited to the Club and the person in default shall cease to be a member of the Club.
- A minimum number of two fully paid debentures must be held or two debentures be under purchase in order to qualify for membership of the Club.
- Ten Debentures will be redeemed annually as a minimum the first redemption period commencing on 1st November, 1958. The method of ascertaining the redeemable Debentures will be by draw and each issued Debenture will be in the draw. Example: A Debenture holder having twenty debentures will have twenty chances in the draw. A member having had his Debenture redeemed shall still remain a member of the Club.
- In the event of a Debenture holder ceasing to be a member of the Club, he may dispose of his Debentures or Debenture to an approved person acceptable to the Club Committee.
- In the event of a Debenture holder leaving the Club's area and not desiring to transfer but to redeem his Debenture, the Debenture shall be redeemed by the Committee. In the event of death by a Debenture holder the Club Committee or Trustees shall redeem any or all debentures held in the Club by the deceased person's estate. Any debenture or debentures so redeemed may be included as part of the debentures redeemable under Clause 8.
- The Committee may redeem all or any number of Debentures at any time.
- The Debenture Certificate to be issued may include a charge over such assets of the Club as the members shall determine and shall contain such conditions and be in such form as shall be approved by the members of the Club in general meeting called for the purpose.
- In the event of the Club not being established all monies paid for Debentures will be returned to the applicants and if the Debenture Certificate has been issued money will be refunded upon surrender of the Certificate.
- In the event of any applicant for a debenture not being elected a member of the Club all moneys paid by him in respect of any debenture shall be returned to him if he so desires.
- This proposal creates no obligation on the Provisional Committee other than to use its best endeavors to found the proposed Club, to account for any moneys received.
- The conditions herein set out are subject to confirmation by the members of the Club in general meeting and may be amended in such manner as the members shall determine.