

Compton Club

The origin of the Compton Club dates back to the late 1920s when it began as a branch of the British Legion.

The British Legion itself was formed in 1921 as a voice for the ex-service community and to provide for their financial and social support. In the years following the Great War, with the economy slumping and many out of work, there was a great deal of enthusiasm for this new organisation and branches sprang up all over the country. Government, then as now, had a poor record of looking after its ex-service people and the Legion has always endeavoured to fill this gap.



Surrey Advertiser 8 Dec 1928

There were other clubs and societies in Compton at that time: the Working Men's Club, a cricket club, a football club, a shooting club, as well as political associations and other social groups. Village life was much more communal than it is today so perhaps it is not surprising, given the need for the services of the Legion, that there was enough momentum to form yet another village organisation.

It was at a meeting in the Withies on 3rd December 1928 that the decision was made to form a Compton branch of the British Legion.¹ Major Rudkin, of Brook House, was elected as president and a committee was formed. I had always believed that my grandad, Walter Batchelor, was one of the founder members and the newspaper report of the meeting confirms that.

¹ Surrey Advertiser, 8 Dec 1928.

Momentum, there certainly was: the following March, the club organised a large parade through the village from the school to the church where the new standard of the branch was to be dedicated. With legionnaires from other nearby BL branches, the procession numbered around 250, far too many to be accommodated in the church.²

There is no record of further meetings of the committee, or what it decided to do to further the cause, but sporadic newspaper reports indicate that they made plans to establish a club house in the village. Fund raising began immediately with a concert at The Harrow just a few weeks after that first meeting and, over the next couple of years, fund raising efforts continued that included such things as bazaars and raffles.



The Grand Bazaar, held in December 1929, was a part of the fund raising efforts.

The land on which the club was built was given by the owner of Field Place, Edwin Greenacre, and perhaps this was the reason that he was the only vice-president of the branch who was not an ex-army officer! Whatever the reason, his generous gift helped to ensure the success of the fund raising efforts.

By February 1932, the building was complete and the Surrey Advertiser was able to report that a whist drive had been held in the British Legion Club Room.³

² Surrey Advertiser, 16 March 1929.

³ Surrey Advertiser, 20 Feb 1932.

The club thrived as there were plenty of ex-service personnel in the years following the Great War. Inevitably, though, numbers gradually declined as membership of the Legion was confined to ex-service personnel but the Second World War brought forth another wave of members.

Again, as the years progressed, numbers dwindled once more although the club was financially successful. It was probably for this reason that the committee of the club in 1971 proposed changing the constitution and name of the club, dropping the Royal British Legion name but keeping the club as the home of the Compton RBL branch.⁴ This would broaden the pool of possible new members.



L-R: Alfred Gorton, Elsie Gorton, Rita, the wife of the bar steward, and Eddie Walker in the third and last incarnation of the bar arrangements in the old building. Eddie was the chairman of the club during the thriving years of the early 1970s.

The same meeting reported that that the club had shown a record profit and turnover during the previous year and that planning permission had been given for an extension to the building. The club was doing well and it is evident that a pro-active committee wanted to keep it that way.

⁴ Surrey Advertiser, 10 Dec 1971

During the 1960s and 70s there was a number of extensions to the original building. An extension to the east housed the snooker table that had been given to the club by Major Rudkin and, at the west end, a new entrance, bar beer store and lounge were built. On the north side, by the bowling green, a small, quiet, lounge was built on the old terrace.

My father, Alf Gorton, was the club secretary for many years during this time of growth and it was he who pushed for these improvements.

The club was a hub of village life. There were whist drives, bingo nights, annual games tournaments, particularly snooker, darts, dominoes and cribbage, as well as the annual village flower and produce show when the club house was filled with produce from allotments and gardens throughout the village.

For me, though, the memorable annual event was the children's party at Christmas when the big question was: can we guess who is going to be Father Christmas this year?



The south elevation of the old clubhouse showing two of the flat roofed extensions at each end. The centre section with the pitch roof was the original building.

The club was also the home of the Compton Bowls Club, a stalwart of which was Charlie Mitchell. For many years he, David West and others looked after the green and kept it in top condition. Like its parent, the bowls club thrived for many years and I hate to think what Charlie and his fellow bowlers would say if they could see the houses that have been built on their hallowed turf.

The houses, however, were a part of the scheme to reinvigorate the club in the 21st century. As in previous decades, the club was experiencing a decline in its fortunes. The older members were dying off and there were fewer new ones to replace them. Moreover, the old building was showing its age.



The north front of the clubhouse with the quiet lounge overlooking the bowling green.

Consequently, in the late 2000s, the decision was made to create a new club house using funds generated by selling for building the bowling green and an old tennis court that lay between the green and Spiceall road.

The old building was demolished in 2008 and the current clubhouse was erected soon afterwards.

Philip Gorton

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Compton Club - before and after

