

Way back when

For over a century the Ski Club has celebrated friendships, cemented over a fine wine

WORDS **GABRIELLA LE BRETON**

Every good Ski Club member knows the story: 14 gentlemen, drawn together by a shared love of skiing, met for dinner at London's Café Royal on 6 May 1903 and decided to found a ski club. Their intention, and the birth of the Ski Club of Great Britain, was recorded with the signature of each founding member on the menu, which – 116 years later – takes pride of place in the Ski Club archives.

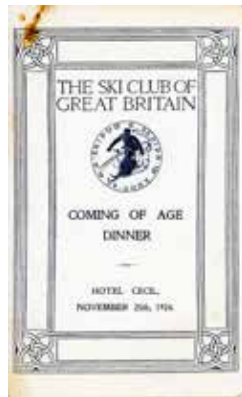
While the Café Royal menu is the most significant memento of Ski Club friendships and agreements forged over fine food and wine, it's by no means the only one. At the De Montfort University (DMU) in Leicester, where the SCGB archives are housed in the Special Collections division, archivist Louise Bruton has unearthed various souvenirs of SCGB dinners, parties and celebrations through the years.

Showing me the menu from a post-AGM dinner at Café Royal in 1912, where Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was guest speaker, Louise explains: "Underlining the importance of dinners to the Ski Club, and assuring its place in history, the dinner menu was used as an attendance record, and firmly stuck into the minutes book for safe keeping."

When the SCGB turned 21 in 1924, members enjoyed a lavish meal and dancing at the Hotel Cecil on the Strand, at the time one of the world's most opulent hotels. A menu from the 'Coming of Age' dinner includes 'Fantaisies Gourmandes', sole, beef tenderloin and pheasant casserole. As the December 1924 minutes show, the evening was a success, with a record 200 members and guests in attendance, including five of the club's founding members. Toasts were made to the King and founders and, when the Hon. E. C. Pery proposed a toast to the health of the SCGB, "...the toast was drunk modestly, if enthusiastically, by the members themselves!"

As the October 1939 SCGB minutes show, club dinners were not always so flamboyant: "There is always a pleasantly informal quality to the Club's Spring Dinners. There are no important speeches; there are so many pleasant memories yet fresh in the mind to exchange; and there are several friends to cheer as they receive their prizes. The last Spring Dinner at Grosvenor House on Thursday evening, May 4th, 1939, was a good example."

Having grown to more than 26,000 members since that auspicious dinner at the Café Royal, the SCGB has spent over a century striving to achieve the aims of its founders: "...to assist members in such matters as where to go, what sort of ski to purchase, and what the general condition of the snow was in such and such a place, etc." And, almost equally importantly, it still nurtures the celebration of ski friendships.



▲ The grand Hotel Cecil on the Strand hosted the club's 'Coming of Age' dinner in 1924

◀ The club's Spring Dinner at Grosvenor House on 4 May 1939 was described by members as 'pleasantly informal'

A MORE SOBER CLUB PARTY

From the Roaring Twenties to the Blitz, the SCGB archives reveal a more sober club scene during the Second World War. Dating to June 1941, the *War Bulletin* explains that "a perilous year has passed since the AGM of 1940" but that, despite losing its windows, "the Club premises have survived the fierce blitzes which have fallen upon London". It goes on to invite members to join the Council at a post-AGM party in July in lieu of the annual Sherry Party in December: "when normally there are many friends to meet and much to discuss about coming ski holidays, but when actually there were only bombs and blackout."



