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# SENIOR MEMBER

JOHN POOLE

Since the death of H.E.L. Porter in 1973 I have been the senior member of the Club. I am not the oldest member in the Club, although I must be nearly that, but I am the man who has been a member for the longest period. I joined in 1920, which must have been a vintage year but I am the only bottle left in the bin. The Club was founded in 1898, one year before I was born, so I have belonged to it for just about three-quarters of its history. I was born in 1899 and I have often thought it a pity that my parents did not show a little earlier philoprogenitive enthusiasm so that the two earth-shattering events might have co-incided. Of course, there is nothing clever about being the senior member. If there were, I could not have done it. All you have to do is get yourself elected at an early age and then outlive your contemporaries. 1980 marks my diamond jubilee of membership and I am looking forward with great confidence to celebrating my centenary.

The Club has meant a great deal to me. Before telling you how I came to join it I had better fill in a bit of personal background. I was the first of my parents' seven children, having three brothers and three sisters. Incidentally, all my brothers joined me in due course in membership of the Club, and one of them (next but one after me, a mere stripling of 74, my brother Gerard) still is. For many years all four of us were members at the same time and the suggestion to change the name to Pooles Club was abandoned only when two of my brothers dropped out just before it was time to implement it. As children, all seven of our family were encouraged by my father to be strong walkers in our native Staffordshire and bordering Derbyshire and we also spent many summer holidays in Llandudno whence we used to sally forth by train or bicycle or on foot to climb the mountains of Snowdonia. My brother Harry, next after me, was only a year and a half younger than me, and I clearly remember how he and I were one day taken by my father by train from Llandudno to Llanberis,

whence we walked up Snowdon by the track which has since become so familiar and then descended by the even more familiar Miners Track to Pen y Pass. On the way down my father knocked his knee against a projecting rock so that he arrived at the Gorphwysfa Hotel (as it then was) dead lame and we had to hire a car from old Owen (father of the man whom I later got to know well at the car park) to drive us down to Llanberis to catch the train back to Llandudno. Besides my first ascent of Snowdon this was also my first ride in a motor car and I am ashamed to say I was more thrilled by that than I was by the climb. Harry and I and later our younger brothers and sisters did many more similar rambles in succeeding years, while we were still children.

My first break into a little more serious mountaineering occurred in 1918, the last year of World War 1. Harry, although my junior, was already in the Army fighting for his King and Country (from a barracks in England) but I was medically exempt, graded C3, which is as low as you can get. That was well over 60 years ago yet here I am now still alive (just) and kicking (not very hard). But that year of 1918, while Harry was defending his native shores, my father and I did a walking tour across the Welsh mountains and back again. We started from our familiar base at Llandudno, walked to Deganwy, crossed the Conway estuary by ferry, then walked over Conway mountain to the Sychnant Pass, paid 6d to get into the Fairy Glen and paid nothing to get out of it again at the top and at last we were on the open mountainside, over Foel Fras, Foel Grach (where many years later I helped build the shelter), Carnedd Llewelyn and Carnedd Dafydd, and finally dropped straight down into Nant Francon. Someone we met directed us to the farm Ty Gwyn, a mile below Ogwen Cottage, and we were hospitably received by Mrs. Williams, whom we later found to be a daughter of the famous Mr. and Mrs. Jones of Ogwen Cottage where in succeeding years I stayed many times. More of that later, if I don't forget. We refreshed ourselves by a swim in Llyn Idwal that evening, and in the next few days walked over the Glyders and Snowdon and Moel Hebog etc. until we worked our way back to Llandudno. On Llandudno Junction Station, as we waited for a train to take us home to the Midlands, I bought at a bookstall for a shilling an illustrated brochure called 'Beautiful North Wales', which had been got up by the Abraham brothers, authors of 'Rock Climbing in

*Opp: Stone Boom, Pordenack Point.*

*Centrespread Left: S. Salmon on the first ascent of Mastodon.*

*- R. Edwards*

*- R. Edwards*

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Stone Boom, Pordenack Point. by R, Edwards

S. Salmon on the first ascent of Mastodon  
by R, Edwards

Mark Edwards on Illustrated Man. by R, Edwards

A turbulent sea chases Roland Edwards up  
Mastodon. by Esther Edwards

North Wales' This was the first I knew there was any rock climbing in North Wales and it set fire to my imagination which had already been kindled by reading Whymper's 'Scrambles Amongst the Alps' and such like famous mountain literature from my father's collection, so as soon as I got home I wrote to Abrahams at Keswick and bought a copy of their 'Rock Climbing in North Wales', and then learned it nearly off by heart.

I was a law student at the time, so on my next visit to London for one of the examinations I called on Mr. John S. Carter, South Molton Street, and he measured me for my first pair of nailed climbing boots as advertised in Abrahams' book. They cost a little over £4 and were duly sent to me through the post. I also bought a 60 foot length of Alpine Club rope (with the red strand down the middle, as also advertised) from John Beale. Next summer, Harry by now having won the war and being released from the Army, he also bought a pair of nailed boots (from Hardern of Keswick). To begin with he and I repeated the walk which my father and I had done in 1918, and I remember that when we dropped in at Ty Gwyn on the first evening out from Llandudno I said "Good evening, Mrs. Williams" and she said "Good evening, Mr. Poole" and we were not even the same pair.

That Christmas we collected two more young men and all four of us stayed at Ty Gwyn and I led my first roped rock climb, all four of us on sixty feet of rope, taking belays every few inches. The climb was the Bristly Ridge on Glyder Fach. The other two chaps, who both later became Town Clerks in their own right, as I did myself, never climbed again. Harry and I never stopped.\* During the next few years we spent every moment of our leisure in climbing. We lived only a hundred miles away from Snowdonia so it was easily accessible by motor cycle. We worked our way steadily through the list of climbs in the Abrahams' book, then on through those in Owen Glyn Jones' 'Rock Climbing in the English Lake District', staying principally at Wastwater Hotel where we played Billiards fives on the table which has long since been removed. In Wales we stayed many times at Pen y Gwryd and also at Ogwen Cottage where we made a close acquaintance with Mr. and Mrs. Jones who had previously entertained the Abraham brothers, Owen Glyn Jones and many others. I was there once in the winter when Mr.

\* Harry has stopped now. He died in his eightieth year, after this article had been written.

Opp: Mark Edwards on Illustrated Man.

- R. Edwards

Centrespread Right: A turbulent sea chases Roland Edwards up Mastodon.

- Esther Edwards

Jones sallied forth one evening in his model T Ford to meet a train at Bethesda. The Holyhead road in Nant Francon was then a lot narrower than it is now, and just below where the snack bar now stands you practically went through a tunnel. On this occasion, a little below there, Mr. Jones' car skidded through a turn of 180 degrees and when he came to a standstill he found himself facing towards Ogwen. It was too narrow to turn where he was, so he had to drive back to Ogwen to turn round and start again. I was there on another occasion, also in the winter, when Dorothy Pilley and I.A. Richards (not yet married) came in for a few days after spending the Christmas weekend with three others on Snowdon summit, as she described in Chapter three of her book 'Climbing Days' One day the two of them set out from Ogwen Cottage and made the first ascent of the Home Climb and when they started to write it up in the book which used to be kept at the cottage they disputed whether the climb should be graded as Difficult or Very Difficult so they kindly took me up next day for a third opinion. I voted it V.Diff. and today you will find it in the guide book as 'Just V.Difficult' which shows how the dispute was compromised. I was at Ogwen Cottage for a month on that occasion, partly recuperating from a fractured skull caused in a motor-cycle accident and partly catching up on my studies which had been neglected and during the next few weeks I repeated the climb solo on several occasions.

I had the great good fortune to join the Club in 1920 on the introduction of one W.J. Williams, who had been an Original Member, and with whose son, the late Professor Gwyn Williams, I subsequently climbed on many occasions, at home, and abroad, including the Monch, the Jungfrau and the Eiger (by the Mittellegi Arete) also the Finsteraarhorn and many other peaks in the Oberland, the Valais, the Dolomites, etc. Joining the Club was a great milestone in my career as it opened the door through which I was introduced to many more companions. (Have you ever tried to open a door with a milestone?). Another milestone was a few years later when I married and found to my delight and relief that although she knew nothing about mountaineering until then, except what I had told her, my wife took to climbing with a great aptitude and has been my companion on a very large proportion of the climbing I have done since. I had gone to live in London shortly

before my marriage and thus had the opportunity of making contact with more of my fellow members of the Club and I soon found myself on the Committee and soon after that for a couple of years as Honorary Secretary. I joined the Alpine Club in 1931, the same year as my wife became a member of the Ladies Alpine Club, and with the recent take-over bid by the A.C. of the L.A.C. she and I are now both members of the Alpine Club.

Two of my closest companions in those early days were Will McNaught and M.G. Bradley. I climbed with them (not in fact often with both at the same time) on innumerable occasions in Wales and also many times (especially McNaught) in the Alps. One or two reminiscences of them: I was once taking McNaught and a young woman friend of ours Bidy Deed up the Chasm Route on Glyder Fawr and as we approached the Vertical Vice McNaught said what a terrible situation he found himself in. When I asked why, he said "Well, Vice above and Miss Deed below!" In the Dauphine, after the Ecrins, trudging home along the Bon Pierre glacier, McNaught said it was getting Bon Pierre and Bon Pierre. In the Engelhorner, while we were staying with Bradley at Rosenlauri, G.R. Speaker took me and my wife and the aforementioned Bidy Deed up the Rosenlauristock. Bradley did not join us but he knew the climb well and he told us that on the way down we should have to abseil over an overhang called the Luftschwingort and that we should suspend the rope from a piton already there which was 'almost certainly safe' We found the piton but it wobbled ominously as we tested it and resisted all attempt to drive it further in with a piece of rock (we had no hammer). So we had to risk it and I was nominated to be last man down on the principle that we could not leave the responsibility to either of the girls and it could not be Speaker as he was a better route-finder than I was and if he got killed I should be unlikely to get the party safely off the mountain. I had never abseiled so cautiously in my life as I did on that occasion and when I finally touched down felt greatly relieved that my wife had avoided or at least postponed widowhood.

But it is on my earliest climbing days that I really wished to dwell, as, I suppose like other octogenarians, I take great delight in recalling incidents of my youth. I have left myself little time for further reminiscences if this article is to be kept to reasonable

length but I must find room to refer to the many happy occasions when I stayed at Helyg in its earliest days. I remember being there once with my brother Harry and we came across a young man named Kirkus who was on his own so Harry and I condescendingly took him up the Pinnacle Rib on Tryfan Central Buttress and ensured his safety by putting him between us on the rope. He did the climb well enough. I climbed often with Charles Marshall, Helyg's first custodian, and my brother Gerard was probably the last member of the Club to see him alive as he visited him in hospital in Chester after Charles' calamitous fall at Helsby.

I think it was from Helyg that I made the first of my innumerable ascents of the Grooved Arete, this time leading George Lister to whom I had been introduced by Herbert Carr (to whom I owe so much, and so does the Club as he practically resuscitated it from oblivion when it nearly expired in the aftermath of World War 1) on my first visit to the Alps. This was before they had published their classic book 'The Mountains of Snowdonia' Lister had a daughter named Eira, whom I first knew as a school-girl, and when she was old enough I took her up the Grooved Arete. Many years later, when I had retired from my job and come to live in Anglesey, I met her again, she having now married and produced a son who was then a medical student, and I took him up the Grooved Arete. I think there cannot be many people who have led three generations of the same family (except perhaps their own family), up the Grooved Arete.

I have just mentioned my retirement from work and coming to live in Anglesey and this must provide me with the opportunity to conclude this rambling article. When I came here in 1959 I learned of the existence of the Mountaineering Club of North Wales and made haste to join it and before I knew where I was I found I had become President, in succession to Charles Evans. In next to no time I had made a host of new friends, many of whom were first class climbers, and quite a number of these were exceedingly kind to me and took me up routes which, in my old age, were beyond my capacity to lead. Thus the M.C.N.W. did for me in my declining years what the C.C. had done for me in my youth and I shall never cease to be grateful to both clubs for the help and friendship I have had from them. I went on climbing up to Hard Severe standard

until I was 70, then unhappily contracted osteo-arthritis in my right wrist and had to give up rock climbing altogether. But I still went on with my mountain walking until a couple of years ago when hardening of the arteries and other inevitable concomitants of incipient senility gradually overtook me and I am now reduced to ambling about on the lower slopes. But my enthusiasm for the mountains remains undimmed. So does my gratitude to the Climbers' Club, which has contributed so much to my happiness.