

PIONEER AMATEUR SPORTS CLUB

An historical account of the original Club Rooms and the CMC's link with the Pioneer Stadium.

The Club meets regularly in a room in the Pioneer Sports Stadium in Lyttelton St, Christchurch. The room also houses our library and a permanent projections screen. Photographs of our Founder Gerard Carrington and Sir Edmund Hillary identify the room as the Canterbury Mountaineering Club venue.

At the 1988 AGM questions were asked about our right to this facility and the following article was supplied by A.G. Flower.

Geoff Flower joined the club in 1931, he has served on the committee and as secretary 1935-1940. Post war he has been Treasurer, Auditor, Vice-president and President 1951-1953. He was elected a life member in 1976. He also represented the club on the Arthur's Pass National Park Board under its original constitution.

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In 1879, less than thirty years after the arrival of the first Four Ships, the Pioneer Bicycle club was established. The name of the Club was shortly afterwards changed to the Pioneer Amateur Sports Club. The Canterbury Amateur Athletic Club was founded in the same year and in 1889 these two clubs were amalgamated.

In 1904 a large gathering representing all branches of sport attended the opening of the new two story club house at the corner of Oxford Terrace and Gloucester Street.

About 1918 a motorcycle section was formed, and the name changed to the Pioneer Amateur Motor and Sports Club. In 1919 the Pioneer Sports Club Ltd. was formed as a holding company to control the premises, older members being shareholders. The instigator of this scheme was Mr Charles S. Thomas, a well known barrister and amateur athletic administrator at that time.

In 1933 the Club Rooms were badly damaged by fire, and, after extensive renovation the Rooms were reopened in late 1933.

In 1935 an approach by Pioneer Executives was made to Russell Harvey, who was secretary of our Club, for the CMC to be granted full membership usage rights. Russell carried the day, he remembers "There were some doubting Thomas's that it would be to our advantage, indeed as it proved to be".

Previously Club meetings had been held in the lecture rooms upstairs in the old Public Library in Cambridge Terrace or in members private homes. The Banks Peninsula Cruising Club, Canterbury Amateur Athletic Club and the Pioneer Motor Club all had usage rights and thirteen other clubs, mostly with their own club rooms elsewhere were affiliated. The Pioneer Club was one of the leading sports organisations with its rooms as

headquarters for the majority of amateur sporting bodies in Christchurch.

The building, owned by the Pioneer Sports Club Ltd. could provide accommodation for three hundred and fifty people in all. The rooms comprising a main lounge, large billiard room, card room, a committee room office, another spacious room for club meetings and kitchen, all on the first floor. On the ground floor, were several shops and offices which were leased out. The club rooms were central and comfortable and available six days a week. You could always be sure to find a CMC member there at lunch at lunch time and it was a regular meeting place on Friday evenings. As Evan Wilson once said 'Ours is the one club that does not need playing grounds, but we do need a meeting place.'

Many a happy hour has been spent at the Pioneer and many a thrilling lecture or Annual Meeting attended. The author well remembers one Friday evening in September 1939, when the Nazis had invaded Poland, and the Star newspaper had the word 'WAR' on it. How that event changed our lives, but the Club and the Pioneer Rooms were still functioning in 1945.

The Club's library, which previously comprised a few books held by Jack Mitchell in Stewart Dawson's strong room, was established in 1937 and was a popular institution among members.

From 1939, until 1948, when he became Vice President of the Pioneer Sports Club, Councillor W. J. (Bill) Cowles was a good friend of our club. He was chairman of the City Council Parks and Reserves Department. And Pioneer President from 1950. Who of these years can forget the 'Sportsman's Welcomes' he organised for visiting and returning teams. Cricket, Rugby, Surf Life saving, Ski Team, the 1952 Australian Hockey Team and a special one for us, Ed Cotter and Earl Riddiford of their return from the Himalayas. These were samples of interesting meetings to which all members were invited. The Cowles Stadium is named after Bill Cowles.

When membership of the 'Pioneer' declined after the war the secretary, George Towart, made valiant efforts to keep interest in it alive. Friday night was a social one and many a CMC member took a turn at running the bar and George also instituted slot car racing and other attractions. It was the prosperous 1950's which really saw the demise of the club. Practically all the affiliated organisations acquired their own premises, and by the early sixties only eight of the previously twenty-two affiliated bodies were using the Pioneer facilities.

About 1966 the Club was disbanded, on a membership basis, and the company leased the building commercially. In 1968 it became apparent that with reduced membership parking and other inner city problems, the building had become

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uneconomic to run. Moving to another site was considered. Early the next year and Extraordinary General Meeting was held and 22 members voted against 6 for the motion to lease or sell the building. The Directors persisted with their action in leasing, so the CMC through its solicitor Brian Barrer, and supported by Geoff Harrow and Deryck Morse sought an injunction before Mr Justice McArthur, Paul Mortlock appearing for the Pioneer Trustees.

In 1974 the Christchurch City Council designated the property along with some adjacent frontages as a site for the new Public Library. The Pioneer Sports Club Ltd. Went into voluntary liquidation in June 1976, and handed its assets to the Pioneer Sports Club Charitable Trust.

In 1977 the chairman of the Board of Trustees announced that the assets of about \$230,000 were to be handed to the City of Christchurch. Of this \$7,500 was to be a gift to the new Library for buying sports reference books. The balance was to assist in paying for the sports stadium at Centennial Park, the project to be named 'The Pioneer Sports Stadium'. One of the stipulations of the gift was that the two remaining full affiliates of the Pioneer Club, the Pioneer Motor Club and the Canterbury Mountaineering Club were to have rent free the use of a meeting room once a month at the Pioneer Stadium in perpetuity. This arrangement was followed up vigorously by the Trustees of the Pioneer Sports Club Charitable Trust, led by the Chairman, Dr J. F. Mann, the writer of this article, and the Pioneer Motor Club representative.

This arrangement the two clubs must guard jealously. Affiliation with the Pioneer was of great value to the Canterbury Mountaineering Club.

On 14 November, 1977 the Mayor and Councillors held a reception in the town hall for all those associated with the Pioneer Club, to mark the gift of that Club's assets to the city! The reception was well attended and CMC members were in the majority. A plaque in the new library records that the Pioneer Club was established in 1879, occupied the site from 1904 to 1969, and made a public gift of assets to the City Council.

The 1904 balance sheet revealed that the assets of the Pioneer Club were £506. Compare this with the amount handed to the City in 1977.

It was sad that the central and comfortable Pioneer Club rooms had by force of circumstances to be relinquished, but the magnificent Pioneer Sports Stadium in Lyttelton Street undoubtedly benefits more young people with its facilities for indoor sport than the old building ever could.

- GEOFF FLOWER



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The Pioneer Amateur Sports Club on the corner of Oxford Terrace and Gloucester Street. The rooms, all on the first floor, comprised a main lounge, large billiard room, card room, a committee room, offices, another spacious room for club meetings and a kitchen -- *John Wilson collection*