

FOGGY DAY IN LONDON TOWN



by Jeffrey P Lindsay

Nothing evokes the romance and nostalgia of a town more than the songs they sing about it. A Foggy Daya nightingale sang in Berkley Square....music reminiscent of those heady days when dining out at the Savoy was more often than not followed by a few hours at the tables of your favourite casino in the heart of London's - Mayfair.

Yet strangely those far off days in the swinging sixties seem to me like they were only yesterday as I vividly recall the bustle and excitement of the development of casinos in London in which I was deeply involved.

The English have always had a passion for gambling and it was endemic among the upper classes. It was however deeply frowned upon by the Protestant establishment that made strong moral judgements on gambling.

Games of Chance were popular amongst the "Gentlemen's Clubs" of Victorian England but were illegal. Young aristocrats and gentlemen throughout the realm played Games of Chance under the disguise of "Private Members Clubs".

The earliest Gentlemen's Club that was said to have regular Games of Chance was No. 50 St. James's, founded in 1800 it still exists today. No longer a club for aristocrats it is now a modern licensed casino that offers Bars, Restaurants and gaming on each of its 6 floors.

London Casinos

As it emerged from World War2 with a vibrant anticipation of the

future, London was an exciting place to be. It was an era that saw ex-patriots and visitors return from America in huge numbers to London once again. And the casinos were high on their list of priorities.

Some of the early clubs that emerged in and around Soho and Kensington at that time such as "The Up All Night Club" were quasi-legal gaming clubs and heralded in a new era of gambling.

There were clubs that had just one Craps table; one such club was set up in a strange but popular location, a basement in Oxford Street in the heart of the renowned London shopping district.

Others were naturally and appropriately more luxurious.



Crockfords - Palace Gate - Pall Mall - London

The Worlds Oldest Private Casino founded in 1828 by William Crockford, who was sponsored by the Duke of Wellington. Its opulent surroundings attracted the cream of Regency Society.



Curzon House – Mayfair

For many years until it closed its doors in the middle sixties, "The Curzon" as it was affectionately known was recognised as the pre-eminent casino in London's Mayfair. It had a personal style and class all of its own which reflected the rich and famous people from all over the world that frequented its elegant gaming rooms.



Aspinalls- Curzon Street

Established in 1960 by John Aspinall or "Aspers" as he was known, it was one of the most extravagant and elegant gambling houses the world had ever seen and usually filled with Old Etonians and Brit upper class men gambling away their inheritances. Today many famous politicians and diplomats find themselves mixing at Aspinalls now run by his son.

The Colony Club- Berkley Square - London



Following the banning of syndicated gambling in Havana in 1959, Meyer Lansky expanded to London and opened one of the first quasi-legal casinos. Fronted by George Raft it was the place to be seen.



Playboy Club-Park Lane

In 1967 Hugh Hefner created headlines when he opened the Playboy Club on 5 floors at 45 Park Lane.



Victor Lownes was the Gaming Director. It quickly became the “night spot “of the new rich and famous.

Many Arabs were visiting London and there was an ex-patriot group that went to Public Schools and Universities in England that became regular members of the Playboy Club, London.

The Middle East war between Israel and Egypt was over and oil prices went through the roof. Arab visitors to London quickly found there way to the casinos.

The Gaming Act of 1968 was well established by now and was the regulator for the compliance of the holders of casino licenses and was enforcing the Gaming Act to the letter of the Law.

In 1975 both the Playboy Club London and Ladbrokes Casino operated in the heart of Mayfair and competed against each other for the 40 wealthy players known as the “whales”.

By now, **John Huxley (Casino Equipment) Ltd** of which I was the CEO, had become the major supplier of gaming tables and equipment, high security gaming chips and playing cards to the English based casinos. The English speaking gaming world

had opened up and London being the centre of trained gaming dealers, the migration of gaming expertise moved to Australia



with the opening of the Wrest Point Casino in Tasmania, the first legalised casino in Australia, albeit Tasmania was a small island off of South Australia. Interestingly enough one of the Playboy casino Gaming Directors was hired by the Tasmanian hotel group to run its fledgling Casino.

Wrest Point Casino - Tasmania



By this time gaming had also migrated from London to Swaziland, a small independent state in Southern Africa, which created the beginning of the Holiday Inn franchise that grew across Southern Africa to over 15 casinos and formed part of the new homeland of South Africa.

The state of Lesotho known for its precious minerals and gold mining also opened a casino to the local inhabitants. Other casinos opened in Botswana and on the Eastern Coastline of Southern Africa known as the “Wild Coast” and of course the most well known Southern African casino of all “Sun City”.



This formed part of Sol Kerzner's gaming empire that we know today.

Casino History Forum

My involvement in the casino industry over many years has been exciting and rewarding and I have made many friends.

By creating this forum and fellowship, my aim is to identify and make contact with people that were either managing or indeed working in those casinos throughout those early days.

There is a wealth of history and heritage that we should preserve the early beginnings and development of the gaming casino's in the UK and world wide.

In addition to helping reunite old colleagues and charting the evolution of the industry as we now know it, the 'Casino History Forum' seeks to provide a number of services for its community.

Library of 3000 Chips

The flagship of these services will be the Casino Memorabilia Library. The library currently holds over 3,000 rare casino chips from around the world all fully catalogued and viewable on our website. Members can add their own connections with any of those listed rare chips (or indeed their own general casino memorabilia information) into the library through their own secure space.



A Casino History Forum auction facility has been developed for members enabling trading between members of our specialised community.

If you are from the casino fraternity past or present and are interested in becoming a "Fellow of the Casino History Forum" or would like to be alerted to the site launch, or have a trade enquiry please visit www.casinohistoryforum.com or send an email to info@casinohistoryforum.com.



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