Chair's Address at the SGC Annual Dinner 2023

Dear Members and Friends,

It is a great honour and privilege for me as Chairwoman of our prestigious Club to welcome you to the annual dinner of 2023, on this our 183rd anniversary. A special welcome to our guests President David Wilson and Past President Michael Copeland from the Ulster Reform Club, Belfast.

2023 marks the 20th anniversary of the merger with the Hibernian United Service Club next door. This has provided a great impetus for all of our members in this our home in the city at No 9 St Stephen's Green.

With two clubs of such diverse origins, the merger might have seemed unusual or unlikely in former times. However, with the passage of time and the growth of the State as a mature member of the EU, our common interests as individuals in club life have led to a seamless and convivial merger.

I think it worth acknowledging the great sacrifices made by Irish Men, North and South in the First World War and similarly in the Second World war that led the way to peace and stability throughout Europe.

I would also like to acknowledge the leading Irish individuals throughout our history who were associated with the armed forces, including Wellington at Waterloo, and Sir Alan Brooke, as Chief of the Imperial General Staff during World War 2, and latterly, Chancellor of Queens University Belfast.

We have a replica of the Victoria Cross on display in the Club, it is the world's highest award for outstanding gallantry and was awarded to our member General Charles Lucas who was its first recipient.

Our Club holds the Royal Charter granted by Queen Victoria and you will see the original document on display in the hall. Since the Club's formation in 1840,

we have been fortunate to have Members who were and are, highly capable individuals. They epitomised a reforming outlook and participated in many of the major events of our political, economic, professional, and social history. They also managed the affairs of the Club to a very high standard over such a long period of time.

What distinguishes us as a Club is the mutual friendship and respect that our Members have for each other, our staff, and all the people that we deal with on a day-to-day basis and informs our identity as a Club.
In a word, 'Mutuality' is at the heart of our lives, a common bond.
The theme of mutuality has run through the life and history of our Club throughout the 19th and 20th centuries up to the present day.

Let us spend a moment to reflect on some of our most distinguished Members.

When we think of the major historical events of the 19th Century there are a few that stand out and one of the greatest of all was the peaceful achievement of Catholic Emancipation in 1829 by one of our Founding Members Daniel O'Connell. Daniel O'Connell was widely admired in Great Britain and Europe for his skills as a Statesman and Reformer, having also been a Founder Member of the Reform Club on Pall Mall. This reform was the greatest political achievement in the Union of Britain and Ireland at that time, and enabled the population to flourish over the decades.

We need to honour our esteemed Member Horace Plunket who is largely responsible for establishment of the co-operative movement for farmers, thereby improving their purchasing and selling powers. We all know this movement has spawned a hugely successful multinational agribusiness that trades successfully on global markets.

Another practical example of the mutual co-operative principle from the 20th century has led to the establishment and growth of the mutual credit union movement throughout the country. Much of this success goes back directly to our Member, Horace Plunket.

In the early 1970's our visionary Member Donagh O'Malley built on St John Henry Newman's great achievements across the green in the most practical way, through the introduction of free secondary education for all.

It is no small credit that many people of today received the gift of an excellent education and allowed them enter their chosen professions and thereby provided many with privilege and comfort.

In a similar way two of the greatest Irish lawyers of the 20th Century were Alexis Fitzgerald and Arthur Cox, both Members who did so much foundational work for the benefit of the State and Industry in Ireland.

One further example of the mutual principle has been the establishment of the international mutual fund industry in Ireland with an international business in Dublin in excess of €4Trillion. The foundation of this great international business goes back directly to the creation of the first Unit Trusts Act in 1972, on which Alexis Fitzgerald advised the Government of the day. The Government subsequently availed of the EU Capital Markets Plan to create an international mutual fund industry in the IFSC, applying more recent versions of the legislation from 1972, much of this achievement can be traced back to the great work of these few Members.

Another present day, Member is former Taoiseach Enda Kenny, who successfully delivered the EU IMP Programme that saw our Country survive and thrive after the Global Financial Crisis in 2009.

We owe a debt of gratitude to all these great Members.

I am pleased that our Club continues to have so many dedicated Members who delight in each other's company and compete so well in snooker, bridge, golf, chess, backgammon, attending the turf, and dining in this, the finest dining room in the City of Dublin.

As in times past, our numbers and fortunes have varied and I am committed to ensuring that the interests of our Members are our highest priority, that we retain our rightful position at No 9 St Stephen's Green and grow our membership for the future. We owe this to the legacy of those Members who have passed the torch to us.

I will finish with the words of another great Member, W.B.Yeats who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature 100 years ago this year.

"They'll cough in the ink to the world's end;
Wear out the carpet with their shoes
Earning respect; have no strange friend;
If they have sinned nobody knows:
Lord, what would they say"