

Olys Gone By

Looking back at the history of London Olympians

After a long break, we're excited to relaunch our newsletter, where we'll be sharing club updates, member stories, and more. What better way to begin than with a special reflection from our longest-standing member, Edward Till?



Edward Till, a Toastmasters veteran and founding member of London Olympians, takes us on a journey through the club's history.

In this piece, Ed takes us through the history, spirit, and evolution of the London Olympians. Whether you're a long-time member or new to the club, you'll find plenty to relate to in his words. Enjoy!

The Journey Begins: Founding London Olympians

I have been the last-standing charter member of London Olympians for so long that it seems natural! I attended the club's first pre-Charter meeting in October 2002, was President twice, and haven't left yet. This year, I mark 30 years in Toastmasters, and London Olympians celebrates its 22nd anniversary. It seems only fitting that I write a few words about the club's history as we relaunch our newsletter.

While its membership has evolved countless times, the essence of the club has remained remarkably stable. It has always been—and still is—a diverse group of people who come together to deliver consistently high-quality meetings while having fun. Or, as an old friend of mine from my “other” home club in Warsaw once put it: “Where else could you meet such a random group of people?!”



London Olympians' first meeting – a small but enthusiastic start to what would become a thriving club!

The name Olympians was a typical club name in the early 2000s when Greek themes were all the rage—just think Athenians or Trojans. Our name was actually reverse-engineered: a club with that name would surely meet in... let's think... Kensington Olympia! Sadly, the hotels and pubs of W14 did not cooperate, but the name stuck. So, when we left Athenians' (our parent club's) Hammersmith pub behind, we took the Piccadilly Line a few stops to South Kensington.

The Olympians Experience: A Club Like No Other

Being a Central London club brings a certain energy. Many are large, international affairs with high member turnover. While Olympians has always boasted a diverse and multicultural membership, it has also maintained an intimate feel. Members tend to stay longer, perhaps drawn by the friendliness and social activities we offer.

Our late, great president, Khurram Chistie, coined our ever-present tagline: “*The Friendliest Club in London.*” One disadvantage of the slogan is that General Evaluators sometimes feel obligated to say that their own clubs are also friendly. Doubtless, they are, and we don't mean to take anything away from them. The tagline is, in fact, aspirational. It serves as a reminder to always welcome guests. Khurram's other great flourish was to ask, “Here at Olympians, we

like guests. And why do we like guests?" The correct answer, intoned by all, was: "*Because they're our future members!*" And indeed, they are.



Khurram Chistie, the late great President of London Olympians, whose legacy lives on through his famous words: 'Here at Olympians, we like guests. And why do we like guests? Because they're our future members!'

The broader reality is that meeting people in London can be difficult, and Olympians offers a rare space where people can connect. Our post-session drinks soon became the often-legendary "*third part of the meeting,*" with members regularly closing the bar. Beyond the meetings, we have always had a rich tradition of social events, from our karaoke-themed charter party to museum visits and, of course, many a Christmas celebration.

But of course, there have been challenges, too. The biggest came about 12 years ago when a disaffected member attempted to tear the club apart. Ironically, he achieved the opposite—the club came together, recognizing that we had something worth protecting. His most outrageous accusation was that we were a "*blight on the local community.*" That only reinforced how much we actually contribute to it.

A Home Through the Years: From Hammersmith to Strathmore

Speaking of our community, we moved around Kensington and Chelsea in our early years before finding our home in the magnificent Grange Strathmore Hotel off Gloucester Road about a decade ago. This location has become our natural base every first, third, and—when there is one—fifth Thursday of the month.

In 2023, to celebrate 20 years of London Olympians, we revisited some of our previous meeting places, reminiscing about the club's incredible journey and how each venue shaped its identity.



Celebrating 20 years of London Olympians in 2023 – revisiting our former meeting venues and reliving great memories!

After COVID receded and we finally returned, it felt like *reuniting with an old friend*.

Our area constantly reinvents itself, and the club evolves accordingly. In the early days, Earls Court had a strong Australian presence, and Kensington was distinctly French—*strewth! Mon Dieu!* A few years later, our membership seemed predominantly Central European. Then came the Spanish, Portuguese, and Italians, often young professionals new to London looking to build their skills and networks.

One of the things I'm most proud of is our strong female speakers. Olympians has long been a club where women thrive, offering sharp humor and fresh perspectives. I won't name names for fear of leaving someone out—but you know who you are!

Looking Ahead: The Future of London Olympians

People come and people go. While it's always sad to see members move on, I take great pride in what we have taught them. Every day, they use the skills they acquired with us to be more effective in their personal and professional lives.

And then, more often than you'd think, people return. Members from the past reappear, usually making a beeline for me as the one familiar face. Sometimes, they're just stopping by to say hello; other times, they rejoin and pick up their journey. These moments fill me with the greatest pride. We are still here, doing what we have always done—and doing it as well as ever.

But we must not forget those who have passed. I pay tribute to Khurram Chistie, Kim Adams, and Zhanna Jarmyn, whose spirit lives on in every meeting.

This is not a farewell—I'm not going anywhere! I simply wanted to take a small step back and shine a light on our rich history and culture. You are all part of that history, and I hope you will be part of its future, too.

As Ed beautifully captured, London Olympians is more than just a club—it's a community. As we relaunch our newsletter, we look forward to sharing more stories, insights, and club updates with you. Stay tuned for more in this edition!

Written by Edward Till

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