

Founders of the Alpine Club

(act. 1857–1863)

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Founders of the Alpine Club (act. 1857–1863), were a group of middle-class men who established the Alpine Club in 1857 and popularized the sport of mountaineering in the Alps during the 1850s and 1860s. The first ascent of Mont Blanc had been achieved in 1786 but most peaks in the Alps remained unclimbed into the 1850s. The sudden interest in mountaineering during these years was once attributed to the extension of the railways, the prevalence of a romantic sensibility, or muscular Christianity. More recent interpretations have pointed to the transformation of middle-class masculinity and the emulation of contemporary explorers in the Arctic and Africa. Mountain climbing became popular during the years when Albert Smith staged a London show about his ascent of Mont Blanc and as explorers searched for the north-west passage and the source of the Nile. Smith's performances transformed social climbers into mountain climbers, and the men who followed in his footsteps adopted a language of exploration to pursue new ascents throughout the Alps.

According to institutional histories the Alpine Club was first proposed by William Mathews (1828–1901), a Birmingham land agent and surveyor, in letters during 1857 to F. J. A. Hort, a Cambridge don. The Alpine Club held its first meeting at Ashley's Hotel, Covent Garden, on 22 December 1857. Of the twenty-eight 'original members' who had joined the club by that date, seventeen had been educated at Cambridge, six were members of Lincoln's Inn, and seven were in holy orders. Writing in 1858 Alfred Wills remarked that the club still looked 'more like "a set of long-legged men" than anything else' (Wills to James David Forbes, 18 July 1858, St Andrews University Library, Forbes 1858/77). Membership of the Alpine Club required ascents in the Alps or contributions to mountain literature or art. Ascents by members of the Alpine Club were recorded in numerous books and in *Peaks, Passes and Glaciers*, collections of climbing essays edited by the first presidents of the club, John Ball (1818–1889) and Edward Shirley Kennedy (1817–1898), a Cambridge graduate of independent means. These occasional publications were replaced by the *Alpine Journal* in 1863.

The Alpine Club included so many climbing clergymen, scientists, and dons that its membership was once said to be dominated by members of the 'intellectual aristocracy'. Leslie Stephen, who joined in November 1858, had edited the *Alpine Journal* before the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and his climbing friends appeared prominently in both publications. Climbing clergymen included John Llewellyn Davies, Charles Hudson, Herbert Kynaston, Joseph Barber Lightfoot, Christopher Smyth (1827–1900), rector of Woodford, Northamptonshire, who made the first ascent of Monte Rosa, Richard St John Tyrwhitt, Isaac Taylor, Henry William Watson, and Woolmore Wigram. Founders of the Alpine Club were more likely to be liberal Anglicans or dissenters than high churchmen, and a significant number at Cambridge and Lincoln's Inn were associated with the 'inclusive' Anglicanism of F. D. Maurice. Ball himself belonged to an Irish Roman Catholic family; the convert Wilfrid Scawen Blunt was one of the few Anglo-Catholics among the club's early membership.

Many early mountaineers were interested in natural history and the emerging fields of 'science'. Geologists were the most numerous, including Thomas George Bonney, John Tyndall, Samuel William King, and Andrew Crombie Ramsay. Other fields included the mathematicians Arthur Cayley, William Spottiswoode, and Robert Baldwin Hayward, as well as the zoologist Philip Lutley Sclater, and the eugenicist Francis Galton. The many dons, scholars, and headmasters included Robert Burn, Henry Montagu Butler, Hereford Brooke George, John Frederic Hardy (1826–1888), who was a private tutor at Cambridge, George Christopher Hodgkinson, Thomas William Jex-Blake, Henry Arthur Morgan (1830–1912), fellow and later master of Jesus College, Cambridge, James Henry Ramsay, Coutts Trotter, and Frederic Morshead (1836–1914), tutor at New College, Oxford, and later housemaster at Winchester College. In addition to Leslie Stephen, men of letters included the positivist Frederic Harrison and Matthew Arnold, who joined the Alpine Club briefly in 1859–60.

The detailed biographical and climbing records in the *Alpine Club Register* reveal a wider membership from the diverse group of genteel professions and 'gentlemanly capitalists'. Thomas Woodbine Hinchliff hosted some of the first informal meetings of the club in his rooms at Lincoln's Inn and more than one in four Alpine Club founders was trained as a lawyer. The solicitors Eustace Anderson (1819–1889), William Dawes Freshfield [*see under* Freshfield family], and Philip Henry Lawrence (1822–1895), the father of the founders of Roedean School, were outnumbered by many barristers, including Richard Baggallay, who was a bencher of Lincoln's Inn, Thomas Brooksbank (1824–1892), Henry Warwick Cole (1812–1886), Robert Porrett Collier, William Edward Hall, Francis Vaughan Hawkins (1833–1908), and John Rigby. Alexander Bennett McGrigor (1827–1891) practised in Glasgow, Isham Henry Edward Gill (1830–1888) in Liverpool, Spence Watson in Newcastle, Frederick William Jacomb (1828/9–1893) in Huddersfield, and Henry Cadogan Rothery in the ecclesiastical and Admiralty courts. Birmingham was represented by the barrister Alfred Wills and the solicitor Charles Edward Mathews. Entertainers in the club included a former barrister Samuel Brandram, the reciter, and Albert Smith himself, who had been trained in medicine. Physicians and surgeons included Thomas Herbert Barker (1814–1865), a prominent sanitary reformer, William Brinton, Robert Liveing (1834–1919), John Lumsden Propert, Francis Sibson, and John Simon, the public health officer.

Other public administrators and civil servants included Herman Merivale, George Dasent, Robert Barkley Shaw, and Reginald John Somerled Macdonald (1840/41–1876) in the Colonial Office. Politicians included John George Dodson, Auberon Herbert, Adolphus Warburton Moore, private secretary to Randolph Churchill (who was not a climber), and Joseph Chamberlain, who briefly belonged to the club from 1858 to 1861. Publishers included William Longman, John Murray, and Robert Cradock Nichols (1824–1892), printer to the House of Commons.

Businessmen climbers were more likely to be merchants than financiers or manufacturers. Financiers included the bankers William Frederick Baring (1822–1903) and John Birkbeck (1817–1890), and a member of the stock exchange, William Trotter (1839–1908). Many Quaker businessmen became mountaineers and joined the club, including Francis Fox Tuckett (1834–1913), a leather merchant in Bristol, Joseph Hoyland Fox (1833–1915), a woollen merchant and banker in Wellington, Somerset, and the brewers Edward North Buxton and Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, third baronet (1837–1915). The woollen merchant and politician William Edward Forster was brought up a Quaker but adopted a liberal Anglicanism. The brothers Alfred Traill Parker (1837–1900) and Samuel Sandbach Parker (1837–1905) were merchants and shipowners from Liverpool. Industrialists included Thomas Stuart Kennedy (1841–1895), a Cambridge-educated engineer in Leeds who

was among the original members, George Henry Strutt (1826–1895), a founder of the club, who ran his family's textile mill at Belper, Derbyshire, and Stephen Winkworth (1831–1886), silk weaver and cotton spinner at Bolton, Lancashire, whose sisters were noted hymn translators; he climbed with his wife, Emma, a daughter of Thomas Thomasson, and several of their climbs were 'first ascent by a lady'. The lawyer Henry Warwick Cole was also accompanied by his wife, Eliza, on climbing expeditions; she wrote an account of a tour of Monte Rosa (1859). The Liverpool lead merchant Francis Walker (1808–1872) took his son Horace Walker (1838–1908) and daughter Lucy Walker climbing with him. Although the male Walkers became members of the Alpine Club, Lucy Walker did not; women were not admitted until 1974.

Many members of the Alpine Club had connections to wider exploration and travel including the younger John Barrow [see under Barrow, Sir John], son of the polar explorer, Charles Richard Weld, connected to the Franklin expeditions at the Royal Society, John Ryder Oliver (1834–1909) in the Indian army, and Henry Haversham Godwin-Austen in the survey of India. Gentlemen travellers of independent means included Edward Levi Ames (1832–1892), who inherited a Dorset estate, Florence Crauford Grove (1838–1902), Arthur Thomas Malkin (1803–1888), an Inverness-shire landowner, John Ormsby, Charles Packe (1826–1896), heir to an estate in Leicestershire, and Anthony Miles William Adams Reilly (1836–1885).

The club included the architects Charles Ainslie (1820–1863), who also pursued archaeological interests, and Thomas Witlam Atkinson, and the artists George Barnard (1807–1890), a landscape painter, Edmund Thomas Coleman (1823/4–1892), who in addition to making ascents of Mont Blanc climbed in North America, Elijah Walton, and Edward Whymper, an engraver from Lambeth. The tragic death of four climbers during Whymper's first ascent of the Matterhorn in 1865 was widely debated and soon regarded as the end of an era coinciding with the founding of the Alpine Club: the 281 members who joined the Alpine Club between 1857 and the end of 1863 came to be identified as a distinct founding generation. By the 1890s the period from the mid-1850s to 1865 was recalled as the 'golden age' of mountaineering in the Alps.

The generation that founded the Alpine Club was attracted to muscularity, manliness, and a rugged gentility in a variety of forms, from Alpine climbing to the fashion for wearing beards. Many Alpine Club founders were active in the volunteer movement and some climbing schoolmasters promoted athleticism in the public schools. So many mountaineers were liberal Anglicans, dissenters, or even proponents of agnosticism or scientific naturalism (Stephen and Tyndall, for example) that the emergence of mountaineering appears connected in complex ways to contemporary challenges to theological as well as geographical orthodoxy. Politically, Alpine Club founders were overwhelmingly Liberal, but after the Liberal split in the mid-1880s they tended to become Unionists and supporters of empire. Yet the founders of the Alpine Club were diverse and not representatives of one sect or party. They were frequently in contention with one another about issues ranging from theories of glacial motion or climbing without guides to settling claims of priority in first ascents. British mountaineers owed much of their success to a generation of Alpine guides who lived among the mountains, a debt which some of them generously acknowledged in a tribute to the guides fittingly entitled *Pioneers of the Alps* (1888).

The Alpine Club rented rooms at 8 St Martin's Place, Trafalgar Square, in 1858. The club later moved to 23 Savile Row in 1895 and to 74 South Audley Street in 1937, where it remained until 1990. After selling its lease and briefly sharing quarters with the Ski Club of Great Britain at 118 Eaton Square, the Alpine Club in 1991

acquired its first permanent home, a renovated Victorian warehouse at 55 Charlotte Road, London, which houses a lecture room, bunkhouse, and an extensive library and archive of mountaineering history, literature, and photographs.

Sources

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See also

Arnold, Matthew (1822–1888), poet, writer, and inspector of schools

Atkinson, Thomas Witlam (1799–1861), architect and artist

Austen, Henry Haversham Godwin- (1834–1923), explorer and geologist

Baggallay, Sir Richard (1816–1888), judge

Ball, John (1818–1889), glaciologist and politician

Barrow, John (1808–1898)

Barrow, Sir John, first baronet (1764–1848), promoter of exploration and author

Blake, Thomas William Jex- (1832–1915), headmaster and dean of Wells

Blunt, Wilfrid Scawen (1840–1922), hedonist, poet, and breeder of Arab horses

Bonney, Thomas George (1833–1923), geologist

Brandram, Samuel (1824–1892), reciter

Brinton, William (1823–1867), physician

Burn, Robert (1829–1904), classical scholar and archaeologist

Butler, Henry Montagu (1833–1918), college head

Buxton, Edward North (1840–1924), conservationist and brewer

Cayley, Arthur (1821–1895), mathematician

Chamberlain, Joseph [Joe] (1836–1914), industrialist and politician

Collier, Robert Porrett, first Baron Monkswell (1817–1886), judge

Dasent, Sir George Webbe (1817–1896), Scandinavian scholar

Davies, (John) Llewelyn (1826–1916), theologian

Dodson, John George, first Baron Monk Bretton (1825–1897), politician

Forster, William Edward (1818–1886), politician

Freshfield family (per. 1800–1918), lawyers

Freshfield, William Dawes (1831–1903)

Galton, Sir Francis (1822–1911), biostatistician, human geneticist, and eugenicist

George, Hereford Brooke (1838–1910), historian and geographer

Hall, William Edward (1835–1894), writer on international law

Harrison, Frederic (1831–1923), positivist and author

Hayward, Robert Baldwin (1829–1903), mathematician and schoolteacher

Herbert, Auberon Edward William Molyneux (1838–1906), politician and author

Hinchliff, Thomas Woodbine (1825–1882), mountaineer and writer

Hodgkinson, George Christopher (1816–1880), schoolmaster and meteorologist

Hort, Fenton John Anthony (1828–1892), biblical scholar and theologian

Hudson, Charles (1828–1865), mountaineer

King, Samuel William (1821–1868), traveller and scientist

Kynaston [formerly Snow], Herbert (1835–1910), classical scholar and Church of England clergyman

Lightfoot, Joseph Barber (1828–1889), biblical scholar and bishop of Durham

Longman, William (1813–1877)

Mathews, Charles Edward (1834–1905), mountaineer

Merivale, Herman (1806–1874), civil servant and economist

Moore, Adolphus Warburton (1841–1887), civil servant and mountaineer

Murray, John [John [iii] Murray] (1808–1892), publisher

Ormsby, John (1829–1895), writer and translator

Proper, John Lumsden (1834–1902), physician and art critic

Ramsay, Sir Andrew Crombie (1814–1891), geologist

Ramsay, Sir James Henry, tenth baronet (1832–1925), historian

Rigby, Sir John (1834–1903), judge

Rothery, Henry Cadogan (1817–1888), wreck commissioner

Sclater, Philip Lutley (1829–1913), zoologist

Shaw, Robert Barkley (1839–1879), explorer and government agent

Sibson, Francis (1814–1876), physician

Simon, Sir John (1816–1904), surgeon and public health officer

Smith, Albert Richard (1816–1860), author, public lecturer, and mountaineer

Spottiswoode, William (1825–1883), mathematician and physicist

Stephen, Sir Leslie (1832–1904), author, literary critic, and first editor of the Dictionary of National Biography

Taylor, Isaac (1829–1901), philologist and historian of writing

Trotter, Coutts (1837–1887), physicist and university administrator

Tyndall, John (1820–1893), physicist and mountaineer

Tyrwhitt, Richard St John (1827–1895), writer on art

Walton, Elijah (1832–1880), landscape painter

Watson, Henry William (1827–1903), mathematician and Church of England clergyman

Watson, Robert Spence (1837–1911), politician and educationist

Weld, Charles Richard (1813–1869), author

Whymper, Edward (1840–1911), mountaineer and wood-engraver

Wigram, Woolmore (1831–1907), Church of England clergyman and campanologist

Wills, Sir Alfred (1828–1912), mountaineer and judge