

Jolly Old England!

I first want to thank Bill Klatt for that very nice introduction as well as inviting me to attend my first couple of Kit Kat dinners several years ago. This will be a little bit of a surprise, but I also want to thank Robert Wandel for being one of the inspirations for this talk. Some of you may remember Robert's email plea of February 18, 2018 that we recruit a more intellectually diverse membership outside the usual collection of doctors, lawyers and judges as that could result in a more inquisitive and passionate membership...although I believe his words were more sharp and biting than my paraphrase just was. At the time he sent that email, I was really struggling to develop ideas for this essay. His few words forced me to ask myself what I was really passionate about, outside of work and family. Work-related topics, as you know, are off limits, and, while I could show a lot of very cute photographs and videos of my grandchildren, I thought that might be stunningly boring for the rest of you! I do enjoy history very much...but I worried that there are far too many knowledgeable members of our Club to risk the after talk questions that might reveal the amateur nature of my interests. I am very passionate about gun violence, based on my line of work and some of the horrific tragedies I have seen. My intention was to speak on that topic this evening...but a funny thing happened on the way to this essay. I had the talk virtually completed when my wife and I visited the United Kingdom last month. It struck me, upon meeting so many new people, both currently alive and long dead, that my real passion is people. I firmly believe that individuals can make a difference and even change the course of human history. So, instead of discussing gun violence in the United States, we are going to talk

about a bunch of dead people this evening. I've had quite a bit of fun learning about them, the forces that helped shape them and their views of the world, how all of that has resulted in change and, also, how even those of us in the room this evening have been affected by them. After several iterations, I have entitled this essay "Jolly Old England"!

So, let us take ourselves back to the early 1500's in England. As an aside, I apologize to any real historians in the audience for what is probably a very simplistic view of people and events. Clearly, both the people and the events are much more complex than we will be able to discuss in the next 30 minutes. Out of convenience more than anything, we will start with Henry VIII. Henry had become King of England in 1509, succeeding his father. Early in Henry VIII's reign, in 1517, Martin Luther had proposed his "Ninety-Five Theses" to formally begin the historical and religious period that we now call the Reformation. That led to a rather forceful pushback by the pope and Catholic Church. Religiously, western Europe, including England, was in turmoil. The schism between Luther's followers and the Catholic Church really became a front and center issue in 1521 with the Edict of Worms, which forbade citizens of the Holy Roman Empire from propagating the concepts embodied by the Ninety-Five Theses.

Back to Henry for a few moments. The falling out between Henry and the Catholic Church began as more of a practical and political matter, from Henry's perspective, than a religious issue. You see, Henry wanted to annul his first marriage purportedly because his queen could not provide him with a male heir. We will see as we discuss Henry's personal history that this probably is not the only reason. Henry

initially attempted to go through normal channels and appealed to Pope Clement VII in 1527 to annul the marriage. Not surprisingly, that appeal was denied. One has to remember the English monarchy back then was not like it is today. The monarch truly was all powerful. He, for the most part “he’s” but with a few “she’s” sprinkled in, could arbitrarily decide life and death, wage wars, and pretty much do as he or she wanted. How galling must it have been for such an all-powerful individual as Henry VIII to have his powers checked by the Pope in far off Rome? It certainly incensed Henry! In addition to the personal affront Henry felt, this was also a time of rising nationalism across all of Europe, multiple wars and the aforementioned religious schism. In response to the Pope’s refusal to annul his marriage along with the other forces at play, Henry had the English constitution modified in a number of ways that both consolidated his absolute power and separated the Church of England from the Catholic Church. Some of the constitutional changes established the divine right of kings in England, which, in short, meant that only God could judge a king or queen and that the monarch was accountable to no earthly authority...not even the pope. Another established the king as the Supreme Head of the Church of England. He dissolved all convents, monasteries and Catholic abbeys and converted the Catholic Church’s wealth into his own. These new “revenues” supported the expansion of the British Navy from just a few ships to over 50 making it the major naval power in the world for the next several centuries and helped fund Henry’s wars against France and the Holy Roman Empire, although neither of those turned out all that well for England.

Meanwhile, on the personal front, he had his 24-year marriage to Catherine of Aragon annulled as she could not produce a male heir. She and Henry did have a daughter who later became Queen Mary I. Anne Boleyn was the sister of Mary Boleyn who was one of Henry's mistresses. When Anne refused to become Henry's mistress, he was so infatuated with her he decided that he must marry her. Thus, the process to annul his first marriage began. Henry and Anne were secretly married on November 14, 1532 and publicly married on January 25, 1533. The new Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer officially annulled Henry and Catherine's marriage on May 23, 1533. This promptly resulted in both Henry's and the Archbishop's excommunication. On September 7 of that same year, Anne gave birth to the future Queen Elizabeth I. Even back then, people knew that human gestation was 9 months! Despite trying for a couple of years, she had several miscarriages but could not produce a male heir. By March 1536, Henry was courting Jane Seymour. Henry had Anne investigated for high treason and, in April of that year, had her sent to the Tower of London where, after a perfunctory trial, she was beheaded. Jane also paid the ultimate price, dying shortly after delivering to Henry a male heir, who later became King Edward VI. The next wife was Anne of Cleves. Her period as Henry's wife was extremely short. Henry actually tried to back out of the marriage but was told by his minister, Thomas Cromwell, that it was too late and, if he didn't marry her, it would jeopardize the new alliance with the Germans. So, they married on January 6, 1540 but the first night as husband and wife did not go well. The marriage was never consummated, and a quote attributed to Henry was "I liked her before not well, but now I like her much worse." Anne agreed to an

annulment and kept her head. Catherine Howard became Henry's 5th wife in 1540, incidentally the same day that Henry had Cromwell executed. Within about a year, Catherine had been accused of adultery and imprisoned. Retroactively, Parliament passed the Royal Assent by Commission Act of 1541 that made it a capital offense "for a queen consort to fail to disclose her sexual history to the king within twenty days of their marriage, or to incite someone to commit adultery with her." She was beheaded shortly thereafter in the Tower of London. Henry's last wife, Catherine Parr, outlived him and therefore was spared the executioner's blade. And we thought that modern politics were rough!

After Henry VIII's death, for the next 150 years the ruler of England alternated between being Protestant and Catholic. A civil war was fought over this issue as well as what the rightful role of a king or queen should be in relationship to Parliament. After relative peacefulness during the reign of Elizabeth I, the house of Stuart took over the monarchy as Elizabeth had never married and left no heirs to the throne. James I followed Elizabeth. He was able to ascend to the English throne as he was the son of Mary Queen of Scots who was Elizabeth's cousin. Incidentally, Elizabeth had had Mary beheaded as she was felt to be a threat to Elizabeth's claim to the throne. There was a brief period from 1649-1660, after the army executed Charles I, when England became what was called a commonwealth without a monarch. However, the country was really ruled as a military dictatorship by Oliver Cromwell after he dissolved Parliament and became the "Lord Protector" of the commonwealth. When Cromwell died in 1658, his son became the Lord Protector, in essence, establishing another ruling family. The son,

Richard, did not have the confidence of the army and, in 1660, Charles II was brought back as monarch. His son, James II, became king upon his death. James II was Catholic. When he had a son in 1688 who was to be raised Catholic, fears of re-establishing a Catholic monarchy arose. James II also had a daughter, Mary, who was raised Protestant. After the birth of the son, anti-Catholic riots broke out in England and Scotland. James' army deserted him, and he fled to France. At that point, Parliament held that he had "vacated" the throne and, in 1689, invited Mary's husband, William of Orange, to become king and Mary became Queen Mary II.

The time of Henry VIII to the late 1600's was a period of great turmoil in Great Britain – wars, religious schisms, and a back and forth tug between the royalists and those who wanted a more representative form of government were all important public issues. Toward the end of 1600's, the Whigs and Tories coalesced into the two main political parties in Great Britain. The Tories were generally loyalists to the crown and its powers. The Whigs would be viewed, in modern day terms, as progressives who stood for the principles of a Protestant monarch and a more representative government.

Let us now consider a far less well-known actor in this play, if I may tip my hat to Shakespeare and his "all the world's a stage" from *As You Like It*. Jacob was the son of a barber-surgeon father and a mother whose family owned bookstores. He was apprenticed at an early age to become a printer. He was a guildsman...certainly not of the noble class. After completion of his apprenticeship, he established his own firm. His business strategy was to buy the rights to the works of major authors and market them, thus becoming a professional publisher, and possibly, England's first professional

publisher. He was the first to market works of the poet Milton, and notably his epic poem, *Paradise Lost*. John Dryden, the poet laureate of England and Edmund Waller were also part of his stable of writers. He also had a genius for identifying new talent, such as Alexander Pope. The relationship between publisher and writer was symbiotic. Jacob was not afraid of puffing up his and his writers' credentials to sell more books. His writers recognized what Jacob did for them and treated him well, further elevating him in the public eye and, most importantly, in the eyes of the nobility. His strategies in building his business allowed him to be recognized by the gentry as the most direct connection to the major writers and poets of the day and that helped elevate him almost to the level of an "English gentleman", a position he most fervently sought but could never really hope to achieve. But it allowed him to rub shoulders with the upper class who, like that class today, enjoyed hanging out with celebrities. That desire of Jacob's, to achieve recognition as a gentleman, directly impacted his activities and social interactions with the political and literary movers and shakers of the day and brought him into contact with many in the upper class that he would never have had a chance to interact with, much less become friends with.

Over time, Jacob would begin to bring like-minded men together for evenings of eating, drinking, toasting beautiful women, and discussions of politics. He seemed to know that good food, and especially good drink, would keep the group coming back for more. There is one surviving bill for a dinner from 1689 that details what was consumed at a "French run", meaning ordinary, restaurant. 20 gallons of claret, 6 of Canary, 4 of white wine, 42 bottles of ale, and unspecified quantities of "Rhenish" (wine from the

Rhine River region) and champagne were imbibed. Jacob also hired servants, musicians, candles, pipes, tobacco, and a coach to pick up and return the guests to and from their homes. The total bill was slightly over 31 pounds, which today would be worth 4,000 pounds or about \$5,000. The group was made up primarily of writers, Whig politicians and their friends and supporters. They began to meet somewhat regularly and, at some point in the mid to late 1690's, they established themselves as a "men's club". It was viewed as the "most distinguished and influential club of the day". They saw themselves, politically, as the center of opposition politics during the reign of Queen Anne. They believed in the supremacy of Parliament over the monarch and believed that the country and monarch should be Anglican. There really is no surviving history of the club. There were no minutes taken or, if they were, none seem to have survived. Much of the information about this group has been pieced together from the writings of or on known members. They generally met at Christopher Cat's tavern near the Temple Bar, which was the principal ceremonial entrance into London on its western side from the City of Westminster. We are not even entirely certain that Christopher Cat was the man's correct name. It may have actually been Christopher Catling, but was shortened by the attendees to "Cat". Or possibly "Cat" came from the name of his tavern "The Cat and Fiddle". I am, of course, talking about our namesake club, the Kit-Cat Club of London and Jacob is Jacob Tonson, who almost single handedly created the Club and was the major force behind the Club. **[SHOW POSTER]** It is not clear where the club's name originated. "Kit" may be a shortened, familiar form of "Christopher" or it may be from the slang term for a small fiddle from the tavern's name. The "Kit-cat" Club may

also have received its name from the mutton pies that Mr. Cat or Catling made for his patrons, which were call Kit-cats and were generally the food served at the Kit-Cat Club meetings. The membership included writers, poets, politicians, lords, lawyers and members of Parliament. There were no surgeons in the membership as my profession did not really exist in Great Britain yet. It was not until 1800 that the Royal College of Surgeons was granted a charter, formally separating surgeons from barbers. In any event, eventually, the group grew to 39, and for a short period to 44, members.

Just to give you an idea of the influential nature of the Kit-Cat Club's members, let me briefly review just a few of them. Jacob Tonson was clearly the single most important person in the creation and maintenance of the club. He was its official secretary. He arranged the meetings. He was the unofficial chairman.

Sir Godfrey Kneller was born in Germany but immigrated to London in 1676. He was such a renowned portrait painter that he became the Principal Painter for the Crown in 1689. He served 6 monarchs and was in constant demand. There are over 70 of his portraits hanging in the National Portrait Museum in London, including about half of the Kit Cat Club members. The other half of the portraits are located at two other museums. As a matter of fact, the type of portrait he painted of the Kit-Cat Club members, which included the particular dimensions of 36" long by 28" wide and included the head, upper body and one or both hands, became known as the Kit-Cat style. It became a requirement, upon election to membership of the club, that such a portrait be submitted to the club secretary, Jacob Tonson. All of the portraits were displayed in his house in Putney. The overall effect of all members having the same size

portraits with the same parts of the body displayed was to create the impression of a club of equals, even though it was far from that. In all, Kneller painted 40-44 Kit-Cat Club members' portraits over about a 20-year period.

John Dryden was the first poet laureate of England and a Kit-Cat Club member. The grammatical rule to not end a sentence with a preposition has been attributed to Dryden as has been the phrase "blaze of glory". It was actually his public funeral on May 13, 1700 that put the Kit-Cat Club in the public eye for the first time. Of the attendees of the funeral, over a dozen were members of the Kit-Cat Club and they were the ones who paid for and staged the funeral. Dryden had actually already been buried at another local church, St. Anne's in Soho. The Kit-Cat membership believed that Dryden, as the well-known and beloved poet laureate of England, deserved to be buried at Westminster Abbey and they arranged for an impressive processional and funeral service. Through these efforts, they demonstrated to Londoners both their community spirit as well as good literary taste. That they were able to co-opt Dryden and his writings into the Whig narrative was an added benefit! The whole funeral sounded like a circus. One of Dryden's literary followers was Samuel Garth, a physician and Kit-Cat Club member. He arranged for the processional to begin at the Royal College of Physicians. Prior to leaving the College, Garth gave a speech, in bastardized Latin, addressed to the "great god Apollo", which offended several of the religious types attending. However, that did help avoid the discussion of why a man who had died a Catholic was about to be buried in the most famous Anglican Abbey! The processional consisted of the beadles of the Royal College of Physicians leading the way, followed by 8 musicians with crepe-

draped instruments, the funeral coach and then 50 private coaches. Along the way to the Abbey, the processional became entangled with several “moveable Bawdy-houses”, or prostitutes in hackney coaches. Eventually, they reached Westminster Abbey where Dryden was buried. In attendance that day from the Kit-Cat Club included:

- Jacob Tonson
- Charles Montagu, who became the First Lord of the Treasury/Chancellor of the Exchequer for King William III. He also shepherded through Parliament the Act establishing the Bank of England
- William Congreve was a famous playwright.
- John Vanbrugh was another playwright and architect. He designed Blenheim Palace as well as a number of other well-known buildings.
- Samuel Garth was a physician and Dryden disciple in poetry. He had advocated for the Royal College of Physicians to provide free medications to London’s paupers...possibly the first attempt at a National Health Service in England.

Let me take a few moments to introduce you to a few of the other famous and influential Kit-Cat Club members.

- John Somers was an early invitee by Jacob Tonson to the group dinners. He was the son of a prominent attorney. His father had been on Parliament’s side during the English Civil War and he became a prominent Whig, following his father’s beliefs. The Whigs opposed King Charles II efforts to “re-Catholicize” Great Britain and Somers acted as the chief counsel for 7 Anglican bishops who opposed Charles’ efforts and had been put on trial. Somers won their case and

thereby established his own chops in the high stake's world of politics. Following the revolution, which chased Charles II into exile and resulted in Parliament offering the kingship to William III, Somers chaired the Parliamentary committee that drafted the English Bill of Rights, which was the cornerstone of the new constitutional monarchy and on which our own Bill of Rights is modeled. Somers later ascended to several high positions in government, including Attorney General and Speaker of the House of Lords.

- Charles Seymour was the Duke of Somerset, second highest-ranking peer, or member, of the House of Lords. He was exceedingly wealthy and was chancellor of Cambridge University. As the highest-ranking, in the pecking order of English nobility, member of the club, he said grace before each meal. He is also responsible for the tradition of Kit-Cat Club members presenting their portraits to Jacob Tonson after admission to the club
- Baron Thomas Wharton, after the revolution against Charles II, had been the one to propose that William and Mary should reign jointly as king and queen. He was the Whig party's unofficial manager.
- Sir Robert Walpole is acknowledged as Great Britain's first prime minister.
- Thomas Pelham-Holles also later became a prime minister.
- Henry Clinton was Paymaster-General of the Army and Constable of London Tower.

- Charles FitzRoy acted as Lord High Steward at George I's coronation and later served as Lord Chamberlain, a position that managed the king's entire household.
- Evelyn Pierrepont served in the House of Lords and as Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal and Lord President of the Council, a key executive council of the House of Lords and advisory group to the monarch. Today, those represent cabinet positions in the British government.
- Spencer Compton was speaker of the House of Commons and prime minister.

Each of the members of the Kit-Cat Club was highly accomplished. Many of them were leaders in the country and helped transform Great Britain into the democratic country it is today. During the period from the late 1600's until King George III came to power in 1760, the Whig Party held sway in Great Britain and many of the Whig leaders of that time period were members of the Kit-Cat Club. One can only imagine the discussions that they had at their dinners. As we all know from our knowledge of our American Revolution, George III brought the Tories back into power. The Kit-Cat Club was actually very short-lived. By the late 1720's, its members had drifted apart. Tonson had travelled overseas. Petty differences developed between some of the members. And the club just faded away into the fog of history.

So, why did I change topics for this essay at literally the last moment? As I mentioned above, I am fascinated by people and, by choosing this topic instead of my originally intended subject, I was able to focus on my passion for people and how their interactions can create huge impact. Along the way, I learned far more about the

London Kit-Cat Club than I could ever have imagined. In reviewing all of the essays on our website, only one (More Than A Gathering Place) by Joe Reed in 2008 dealt with the history of the original Kit-Cat Club although a couple alluded to one or two of the important characters. Memory being what it is and there being a good number of new members since then, I suspect that most of us in this room did not know the story so this was an opportunity for me to contribute some knowledge to the group that might be of value. Lastly, my wife and I recently visited the UK and spent time at the National Portrait Museum in London. I can highly recommend it to you. It is not often that one can appreciate over 1,000 years of history through the portraits of important characters in that history. An entire room at the museum is devoted to Kit-Cat Club members. I had no idea, until that time, what an important role the members of that club and the club itself had on the development of Great Britain. I wonder where our country might be, politically and governmentally, had it not been for the efforts of the earlier Kit-Cat Club members to move Great Britain to a more democratic society. Also, in my research on the topic, I was also able to find an aptly titled book: "The Kit-Cat Club" by Ophelia Fields. It seems to be the definitive source of all things "Kit-Cat" and contains well thought out and well researched explanations for how and why the club came into being, what its members accomplished, and why it eventually dissolved. I can recommend it to any of you who would like to learn more of the details of the time.

So, pay no heed to the title that was mentioned earlier...we went back about 330 years to England, the politics of the time, and some of the leaders who helped convert

England from a monarchy in which the “divine right” held sway to its current form of a constitutional monarchy.

I very much appreciate being a member of our Club and, now knowing a bit more of the history of our predecessors, I appreciate it even more. I have enjoyed my relatively short time as a “Cat” immensely and am in awe of many of my fellow Cats and their accomplishments. Thank you. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.