



A lowly job amongst the stars

After living in Australia for eight years, time came for the customary Aussie pilgrimage to Europe; and for me, back to English roots. I jetted off with my newly acquired wife, to become barman and restaurant keeper in a small Mayfair pub just off Oxford Street: *The Running Horse*.



This somewhat worn-at-the-edges little place was a block or two from the top-rung boutique hotel for the rich and powerful: *Claridges of London*. In addition, just around the corner were those nightingales in Berkeley Square, the American Embassy in Grosvenor Square and fashionable shops of Bond Street. We had landed in the thick of it; the place known the world over as *Swinging London!*



We lived in a room under the roof, which was slightly bigger than the bed, each morning descending narrow stairs to my wife's restaurant on the first floor and my polished wooden bar at ground level. The manager was a short, stout, Geordie tyrant, who sucked every sinew of work from our antipodean bodies - from nine in the morning to 12 at night

- even to the extent of enforced collection of dregs from used coke bottles, to be re-capped and sold to unwary customers the following day!

But there were some advantages. *Vidal Sassoon - the hairdresser for the stars* - had his London training school next door, so free weekly haircuts came with the job. Then in addition to Vidal's often glamorous trainers and trainees, the pub's lunchtime crush had a habit of producing well-known local residents, such as *Michael Caine* and *BeeGees front-man, Barry Gibb*. After the initial mouth-wide-open type of response, serving the stars became a routine affair; we were their local hide-away and they wanted to be treated as such: just locals. An added bonus was that customers with connections would pass over high-priced tickets, for the latest London theatre shows.

Mayfair, as everyone knows, is at the top end of the *Monopoly* board, thus a few of the locals - especially the famous ones - would tip quite lavishly, helping to subsidise the meagre salary our scrooge of a landlord paid us. Occasionally there would be a *lock-in*, when after ringing the 11 o'clock bell and the local bobby having placed his helmet on the ornate bar, I would bolt the double front doors.



Then with a handful of cockney residents, plus one or two stars also hiding away, enjoying their favourite tipple, we would carry on into the early morning hours.

The landlord however never let up; no matter what time to bed, up under the rafters; we both had to be down by nine in the morning, to mop up and get ready for the next busy day. It was induction by fire! But finally, when the boss accused us of fingering the till, we walked out, never to return. He knew too well that a discrepancy of a few pence for the day was almost inevitable, considering the complex array of food and drinks on offer and the incredibly busy lunchtime stretch, yet he chose to force the issue, causing us to leave. Maybe he just didn't like the Australian variety of the species. We will never know.

Duncan Gregory

www.whittlingourniche.com