

CCTV at the Royal Automobile Club

The Royal Automobile Club is a private club used by its members and their guests, formed in 1897 as the Automobile Club of Great Britain. The two clubhouses at Pall Mall in Central London and at Woodcote Park in Surrey offer members exceptional sporting and dining facilities supported by a total of 490 staff.

Granted 'Royal' status in 1907 by Edward VII, the established and prestigious Royal Automobile Club is rightly proud of its tradition. However there is nothing old-fashioned about its approach to the security of its members, staff and the premises. Security Manager Neil Guild brings to the job over 30 years of experience with the Metropolitan Police up to the rank of Detective Chief Inspector. During his 3 years in post at the Club he has overseen a steady and continuing upgrade to its security, with the CCTV system a central part of that process.



System Design

The design of any security system must first identify the risks to be addressed, and Neil Guild is clear on these: "First there is a risk of theft from in and around our premises, both opportunistic and planned. Then there is a general health and safety issue - and we take seriously our responsibility to look after the wellbeing of all our members and staff. Also, being a well-known organisation with some very high profile members, we face a level of threat of terrorist activity that we address carefully."

System designer and installer Paul McKenzie of Viscount Alarms described how he turned Neil Guild's requirement into a system: "The requirement was clearly thought through, and was an excellent basis for the design. As well as all the other elements of system design, a key part of my job is to select the right camera for the task, and then to get the right settings and the right image coverage, at each of the 50 plus locations where cameras are needed. That doesn't mean always choosing the most expensive camera, but rather having a very clear knowledge of the job each camera needs to do, both in terms of its visibility, meaning should it be highly visible, discreet or covert, and also its performance."

Configuration



A single integrated CCTV system covers the two premises, which are located 25 miles apart. The CCTV equipment in Pall Mall and at Woodcote Park is linked to two separate local area networks (LANs) that in turn are connected to one another by a dedicated high-speed communications link. This complete IT network is used for a number of discrete applications as well as the security system.

At the extensive Woodcote Park site the system is divided into four groups of cameras, each with its own monitor and Vista Triplex™ Columbus 16 channel 320 Giga Byte Digital Video Recorder (DVR), the VC16Te 320CDR. The camera groups cover the Golf Clubhouse, the Cedars Sports Complex, the Service buildings, and the main Clubhouse. The system is monitored on an ad-hoc basis and the DVRs provide continuous 24-hour recording.

Highly visible cameras provide surveillance of the exterior of the buildings and the car parks at Woodcote Park. On initial approach to the site a Sanyo VCC-XZ400P high resolution day/night camera captures a high quality recording of individual car number plates using inbuilt intelligence to zoom into a pre-determined image area each time a car approaches. Further external high-resolution Vista colour cameras (VPC9432) constantly monitor the busy car parks.

With two excellent courses at Woodcote Park, the golf clubhouse is very busy, and CCTV surveillance covers the outside areas where members leave their clubs and certain internal zones including the '19th hole' bar. Evidence that Paul McKenzie's 'right camera for the location' approach works is provided by still shots displayed in the foyer of a known local golf club thief. Despite the usual issue of backlighting as the thief came through the external door, the face is clearly identifiable, which Paul McKenzie puts down to the ability of the carefully selected Wattec compact colour camera (WAT-250D) to handle backlighting. "This man is known to other Surrey golf clubs, but ours is the only system to have captured a good identification of him, which the police were very pleased with".

The recently upgraded sports complex, as well as requiring CCTV to protect premises and equipment, has the highest health and safety requirement of the whole system. With the well-being of customers and staff as a top priority, the high quality images from the discreet Vista dome cameras (VFD4V9C/We) are carefully monitored for any risks or incidents throughout the sports complex that includes the exercise equipment room, treatment room, fitness studio, and pool.

The Club's main function rooms, dining areas, and accommodation facilities at both Woodcote Park and Pall Mall provided perhaps the biggest challenge for the installer. "Matching the security system to these fine buildings and the aesthetics of the club needed careful thought," explained Paul McKenzie. "In Pall Mall in particular, where planning restrictions applied to our work, it was essential to blend the system in with the fabric of the building, by good camera selection and careful wiring. The protection of the expensive works of art and other requirements cannot be compromised, but the installation must complement rather than contrast with the location's ambience." With this in mind, more Watec cameras have been widely deployed throughout the Clubhouse, chosen for their discreet appearance as well as their performance.

Because all the cameras link to their local area networks, authorised users can view all camera images and the contents of the DVR hard disks via PCs at any time. Using the free issue WaveReader™ software supplied with the Vista Triplex™ Columbus DVRs, Neil Guild can quickly download images of any incident onto his PC and then burn it onto a DVD (much higher capacity than a CD) to supply to the police. The system ensures that there is an evidential quality image captured of every visitor to the Club at both sites, and the watermarking of images undertaken by the Columbus Triplex™ DVR ensures that the evidence is robust and tamper proof. The staff commented on the ease of use of the DVRs for both searching and recording compared with the time-consuming processes inherent in VCR operations.



A highly successful system

The system is highly successful and there are plans for further extensions in the future. Paul McKenzie summed up the issues involved in supporting his clients. “We have a reputation for supplying systems that are both good value for money and technically excellent, and we maintain those systems against demanding service level agreements. So we need to use a distributor with proven reliability in supplying new and replacement equipment at competitive prices, plus very high quality technical backup. That is why Viscount Alarms uses Norbain as our preferred supplier on this and many other high-profile contracts.”