

## From the Archives

### Early beginnings of Tennis at Roehampton Club

Using a combination of the Club's records, the British Newspaper Archives and additional research sources, the following



article provides an illustrative guide to the early beginnings of tennis at Roehampton Club and its successful evolution. By the time the Club had formed in 1901, the game of tennis had been well established in Great Britain with a set of rules adapted from Real Tennis, laid down by the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) in 1875 and subsequently amended by the All England Croquet & Lawn Tennis Club leading up to the first Wimbledon tennis tournament in 1877.

The Davis Cup had only just taken place in 1900 between Great Britain and the United States and the concept of the Grand Slam was unknown at this time and remained the case until the mid-1920's. Coinciding with the interest in the game at the MCC and the



All England Club, the fundamentals of tennis had also been set out and patented by a British army officer, Major Walter Clopton Wingfield, in the form of a box set which was available to purchase. This included the dimensions of the court, the markings, the net and its height, the provision of tennis rackets/tennis balls together with an instruction manual on how to play the

game. Players were also encouraged to buy his book at the same time. Another impressive example of the influence of the armed forces and/or its representatives in the development of international sport and recreation alongside polo, hockey, and football. The croquet lawns at many of the established clubs around the UK provided the ideal surface for lawn tennis. The aristocracy was also responsible for popularising the game adding tennis courts to their estates and organising social events, exhibition matches and private tournaments.



With the membership profile at Roehampton Club in the early 1900's, its reputation for the quality of its croquet lawns and the burgeoning interest in the game of tennis, it was a natural evolution for the Club to introduce tennis facilities on different surfaces and ultimately indoors. The first meeting of the newly appointed Tennis Committee at Roehampton Club took place on Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> of April attended by the following members: Mr CD Miller (in the chair), Mr A Stuart Morrison, Mr FRD Onslow, Mr CE Adams and Mr J de Courcy Atkins. The meeting provisionally agreed

a total number of eleven Lawn Tennis Bye Laws to be followed by the Club including the Laws of the Game as laid down by the Lawn Tennis Association. The bye laws covered a range of subjects including footwear, court costs, booking arrangements, timings, club matches and tournaments. The court costs for members were fixed at 5 shillings for a period not exceeding one and a half hours. Visitors were required to pay 1 shilling to play on weekdays and 2 shillings to play at weekends. Members were also required to provide their own tennis balls. The Club would only supply balls for Club Matches and Tournaments.

At the following meeting in May, a vote of thanks was accorded to the Secretary of Chiswick Park Tennis Club, Mr JN Burkhill, for his assistance in the development of the Lawn Tennis Bye Laws subsequently adopted by the Club. The meeting also confirmed the appointment of Tom Fleming as Tennis Professional providing lessons at a fee of 4 shillings per hour and would also be available for the repair of racquets. Ball Boys would also be available at a cost of 6d each. The meeting in July 1912 agreed seven grass courts and six hard courts for play in the coming season. It also confirmed that the Club was unable to field a team to play a match against Tulse Hill but would accept an offer from the Wallington Tennis Club to play fixtures home and away next year.



The first club tournament for the members was agreed at the meeting in June 1913 to take place on Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> of June finishing on the 31<sup>st</sup> of July. Matches were to be played on the grass courts unless mutually agreed by both players to play on the hard courts. In March 1914, it was decided to hold the first Open Tennis Tournament at Roehampton on the date sanctioned by the Lawn Tennis Association. The Games Manager for the Club, Major Larcombe drafted a programme for the event to take place from the 11<sup>th</sup> of May

with a first prize of £5 for the winner of the Men’s Singles Competition and £4 for the winner of the Ladies Singles. The event was extremely successful as confirmed by the following quote from the Sporting News in May 1914 which read as follows ‘For their first hard court tournament, the Roehampton Executive met with such pronounced success that one may feel certain the meeting will now occupy a recognised place in future years’.

The next edition of the *Roehampton Club Recorder* will highlight the early tennis personalities at the Club, the finalists involved in the 1914 Open Tennis Tournament and the private tennis tournaments involving our Members.

