

From the Archives – 9 July 2020

Roehampton Club in 1934 featured in the *Bystander Magazine*



In another interesting snapshot of the past, journalist Charles Graves from the *Bystander Magazine* wrote a glowing report of the Club in the 1930's reinforcing the success of the Club in the early years and its social standing. The article initially talks about Roehampton Club as the youngest of the three Polo Clubs in London alongside Hurlingham and Ranelagh and its 'cheerful atmosphere'. The Ranelagh Club is no longer around but was situated in the grounds of the local area, known as Barn Elms.

The demise of polo at the Ranelagh Club was particularly ironic as one of the leading members at Ranelagh at the time, Sir George Hastings had predicted that Roehampton Club would not survive! The early success of Roehampton Club had been driven by the average age of the members between 28 and 30 years of age with a large influx of young members from the universities – twice the number achieved by the other clubs previously mentioned. It was six years after the First World War that the founders of Roehampton Club exercised their option to buy the freehold of the one hundred and ten acres which comprise

Roehampton Club at a price of £66,000. The author of the article in 1934 suggests that it was worth a quarter of a million pounds based on the boom in building development which would benefit the 2,400 members and their use of the polo fields, thirty two tennis courts, twelve croquet lawns, three squash courts, two swimming pools, an open air riding school and stabling for a hundred and eighty polo ponies. This was in addition to an 18-hole golf course

regularly frequented by the former King of Spain who had survived the global pandemic from ten years previously and had also been told to stop playing polo under doctors' orders. The Aga Khan was also a keen golfer at the Club with a handicap of 6 playing often with club maker Harry Nash at his favourite time of 8.30am.

The Prince of Wales and the Duke of York are also honorary members of the Club making their appearances in the Household Brigade Tournament which takes place at Roehampton Club in the spring. The Games Manager for the Club, Colin Aylmer is also mentioned with his plus two handicap together with Peter Miller who holds the Amateur record of 71 for the course and recently won the Open Championship of Egypt. Other regular players of note include a family member from International Hockey, AD Stocks, the former Admiral of the Fleet, Lord Jellicoe and the former Head of Sandhurst, General Sir Harold Fawcus who became Head of the Red Cross at the time of the publication.

One of the leading amateur squash players at this time and considered to be the first truly dominant player in the sport was also a member of the Club. Amr Bey, an Egyptian diplomat, and six-time winner of the British Open in consecutive years from 1933 to 1938. Another all-rounder across several sports featured in the *Bystander* article was Colonel Davidson of the War Office who played golf, squash, and tennis at a high level.



Bolton is head groundsman



Woolton looks after the many tennis courts

There was also reference to croquet at the Club with the headquarters of the sport based at this time at the Club brimming with Champions and ex-Champions. Heading this list was the 'small wiry', Miss Steel who rarely gets beaten. Another player of note was Colonel du Pre who was captaining a team destined to play in Australia and has his own golf course at Beaconsfield. Other croquet stars include Trevor Williams, former Open Champion in the UK and Canada combining these achievements alongside his role as Chairman of HMV. Yet another ex-Open Champion, Humphrey Hicks is described wearing his panama hat, preferring to play bridge at Crockford's or golf, never practising, hating the game but nearly always winning his games.

Duff Matthews is mentioned as 'perhaps the greatest stylist' of the game. The enthusiasm of the section is highlighted with an example of the players sweeping the lawns themselves after being covered in snow in the early spring. The Captain of the Lawn Tennis team is referred to as the 'sad-eyed, left-handed', JB Gilbert usually partnered by Gerald Sherwell, 'the South African, who is as gay as Gilbert is gloomy'. Miss Dearman is the best of the women players. She plays in the doubles at Wimbledon, and each year gets nearer to the Final.



The journalist concludes his view of the Club by saying 'There is no doubt about it, Roehampton is primarily a games club rather than a clubhouse with facilities for games. With the possible exception of polo, people go there to play games instead of to watch other people. The great point about Roehampton ... people do not put on their best dresses to go there. They go in order to play games themselves'

Steve Riedlinger | Club Archivist