

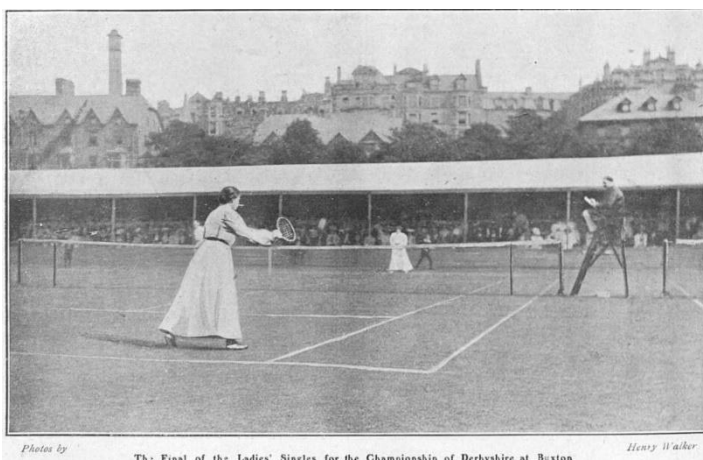
From the Archives

Tennis personalities at Roehampton Club in the early years

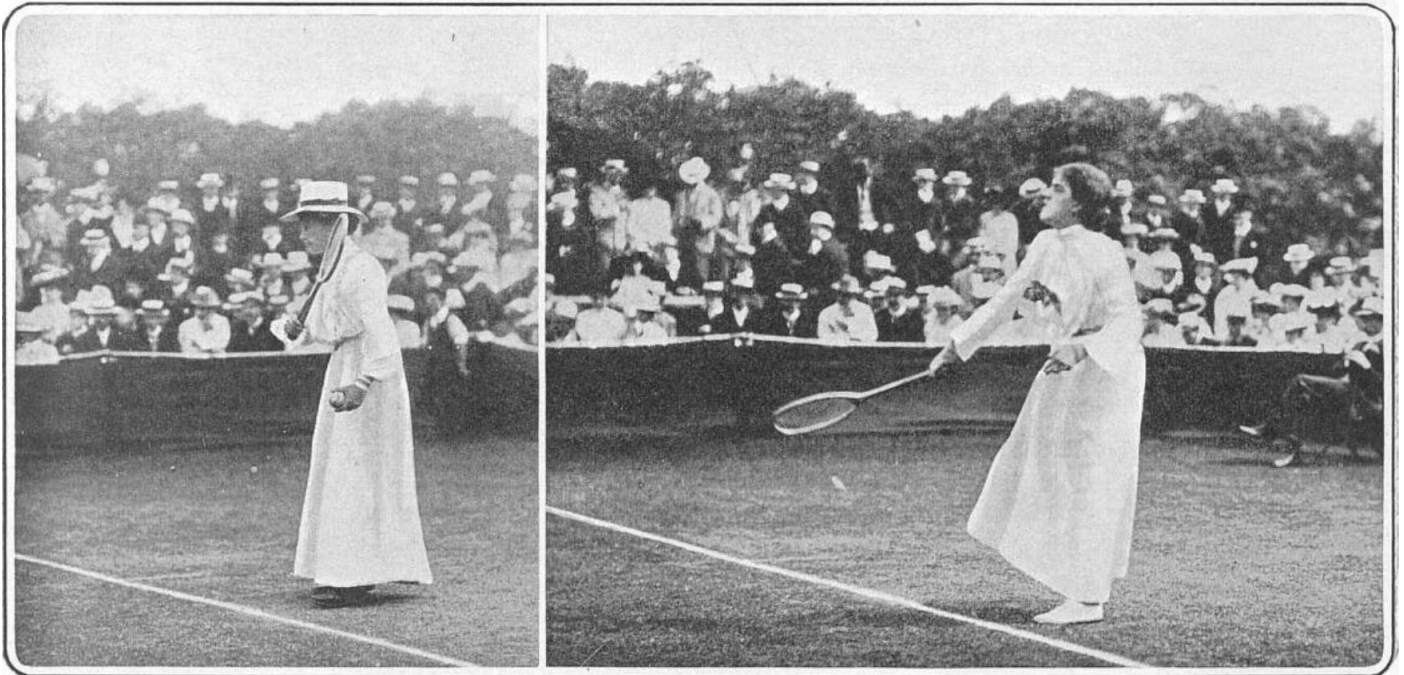
Prior to the first open tennis tournament at Roehampton Club which took place in 1914, the Club had already recruited a prominent figure who ensured the strong associations with the Wimbledon Championships which continue to this day. Major Dudley Larcombe was appointed Games Manager for the Club before the advent of the First World War. His CV was impeccable as he was also responsible for the Wimbledon Championships as Tournament Director and went on to become the Secretary and Manager of the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club.

He was featured in the *Bystander Magazine* in 1934 with a glowing report of his contribution to the game and his personal attributes. It would be fair to assume that the development of his organisational skills and his ability to deal with temperamental players was honed from his time in the army between 1906 and 1913 in the Guernsey Light Infantry. The description of his personality and his considerable gravitas features heavily in the article, making him the ideal candidate for the various roles he took on throughout his career. His appearance is described as thick set with his eyes wide apart looking like a middle weight boxer. One of his peculiarities was mentioned as his quick thinking which sometimes caused him to start a sentence merging too quickly with the next which could baffle the recipient of his words. There are also stories of his ability to go to sleep at a moment's notice whatever he was doing. On one occasion he slept through a particularly noisy musical comedy while sitting in the third row of the stalls.

Despite these eccentricities, the overriding impression of his personal skills in the article comes across as his immense gift for patience when dealing with difficult situations. While his own sporting achievements were limited in the form of several tennis championship wins in the Channel Islands, and playing hockey for Middlesex, it was his wife who took the limelight for her consummate tennis skills and her accomplishments.



Ethel Warneford Thomson married Major Larcombe in 1906. Three years previously in 1903, she had finished as Runner Up in the Ladies Singles Competition at Wimbledon losing 6-4, 4-6, 6-4 to Dorethea Douglass. This was only her second appearance in the Ladies Singles the previous year losing in the first round to Agnes Morton. Between 1903 and 1920,



Miss Ethel Thomson, the runner-up

Miss D. K. Douglass, the winner

THE FINAL FOR THE LADIES' LAWN TENNIS CHAMPIONSHIP AT WIMBLEDON

Ethel made no less than 9 appearances in Wimbledon finals winning the Ladies Singles in 1912 and the Mixed Doubles in 1914 with James Cecil Parke. She was also favourite to retain her title in the following year until she was forced to retire as a result of being hit in the face by a tennis ball in the Mixed Doubles competition by her playing partner James Cecil Peake.



Major Larcombe (right) watches one of the men place new turf in a worn patch on the centre court at Wimbledon, where preparations are now in progress for the tennis championships.

She clearly recovered from this setback in the intervening years at the Wimbledon championships, finishing runner up on two other occasions in the Ladies Singles, runner up three times in the Ladies Doubles and runner up on one occasion in the Mixed Doubles. Many of these opponents and playing partners played regularly in the subsequent open tournaments at Roehampton Club.

Away from Wimbledon, Ethel Larcombe had also won the Scottish Tennis Championships three times from 1910-1912 and the Irish Tennis Championship in 1912. Her playing style was described as different to that of her contemporaries using an

underhand service although well regarded for her overhead smash. One of her playing opponents, Dorothea Lambert Chambers who had beaten her in the Wimbledon Ladies Singles Final in 1914 was quoted as saying that she was one of the best female volleyers of her time. Mrs Larcombe did not confine her racket skills to Tennis as she was also the holder of 11 titles in the All England Badminton Championships in a successful number of years from 1900 winning the Ladies Singles on five occasions, the Ladies Doubles on four occasions and two occasions in the Mixed Pairs.



This husband and wife combination in the early years of tennis at Roehampton Club represents a distinctive foundation on which the Club would build its reputation in the game with a number of well organised tournaments sanctioned by the All England Club and used by the leading players of the day as part of their preparation for the Wimbledon Championships. The social side of the Club and its ability to attract interest from the upper echelons of society also played a part in ensuring its contribution to the sport.

The next edition of the *Roehampton Club Recorder* will feature the career of the first Tennis Professional at Roehampton Club and his coaching skills with one of the best British female tennis players ever to play the game.

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