

Tennis personalities at Roehampton Club in the early years



As mentioned in a previous article, the meeting of the Lawn Tennis Sub Committee at Roehampton Club in March 1914 decided to hold the first Open Tennis Tournament at the Club in the same year on a date sanctioned by the Lawn Tennis Association. Also, worth mentioning in the same year that the first Lady Member of the Club was appointed to the committee.

Mrs HJ Burkhill was an accomplished tennis player in her own right and was well known at Roehampton Club with her husband who was Secretary of the Chiswick Park Tennis Club and had already helped in the development of the Lawn Tennis Bye Laws adopted by the Club. The committee had agreed the promotion of the event with prize money of £5 for the winner of the Men's Singles and £4 for the winner of the Ladies' event. The tournament was well attended by many of the world leading players at the time including multiple winners from previous Wimbledon Championships. Five of the players involved at the inaugural tennis tournament at Roehampton Club had made no less than 20 appearances between them at Wimbledon from 1903. Several Roehampton Club Members had also previously distinguished themselves at Wimbledon in the following roll of honour



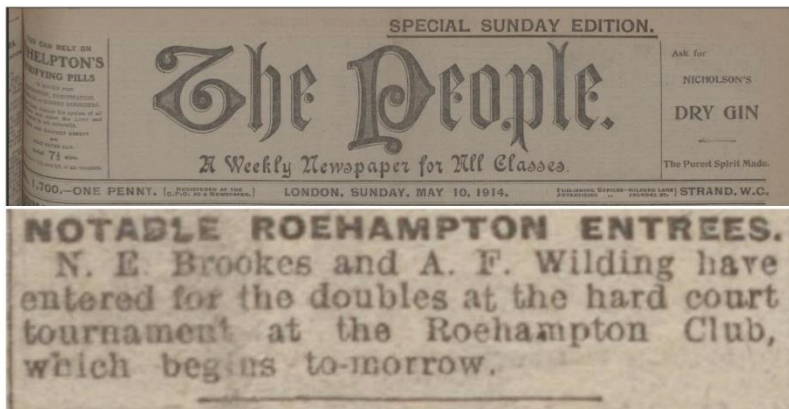
Ethel Warneford Thomson Larcombe – Loser, Ladies Singles 1903, Winner, Ladies Singles 1912 and Winner, Mixed Doubles, 1914

Ernest Wool Lewis – 5-time Finalist in the Men's Doubles, winner in 1892

Ernest James Renshaw – Winner on five occasions in the Men's Doubles with his brother William

William Charles Renshaw – Winner on five occasions in the Men's Doubles with his brother Ernest

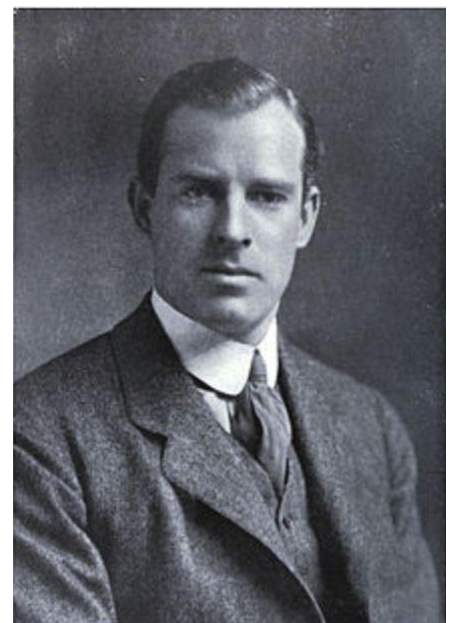
Capt. Hope Crisp – Loser in the fifth round of the Men's Singles, 1913. Winner, Mixed Doubles 1914



The star attraction for the event at Roehampton Club was undoubtedly Anthony Wilding, considered at the time to be the world's first tennis superstar. His entry in the Men's Doubles with his partner NE Brookes was covered in the Sunday edition of the *People* newspaper at the time. He was a handsome man, born into a

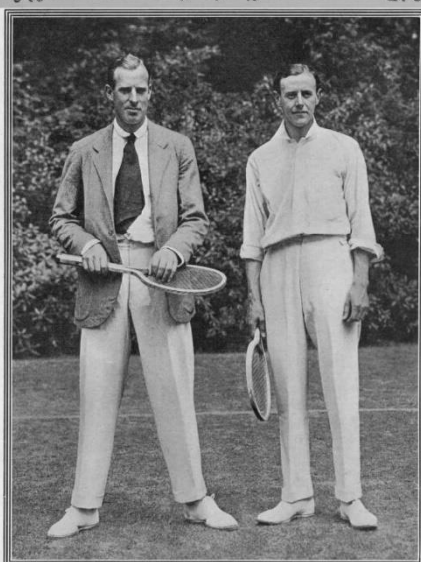
wealthy English family who had emigrated to Christchurch in New Zealand in 1879 where he learnt to play tennis from the age of six on their estate on the banks of the Heathcote River near Christchurch. He was able to practice on two private tennis courts – one was an asphalt surface for the winter and the other was grass for the summer.

He arrived in England in 1902 after a seven-week sea voyage and attended a school in Hunstanton before passing entrance exams to study Law at Trinity College Cambridge. It was here where he developed his talent for the game as a member of the Cambridge Lawn Tennis Club visiting Wimbledon in 1903 to watch the Championships. He was good enough to enter the Championships the following year making an impressive debut in the event losing in four sets to the 1896 winner Harold Mahony in the second round. Wilding was reportedly pleased with his performance against the last Scottish-born player to win Wimbledon until the victory in 2013 of Andy Murray.



In 1905, Wilding made his debut for the Australasia team in the Davis Cup playing in

the semi-final against Austria at Queens Club in London winning both his matches to put his team into the Final where they lost to the USA. After playing in a couple of minor events in the UK, Wilding went on his first tour of Europe where he experienced the glamour of high society in a number of fashionable resorts starting in Germany. In 1906, he toured extensively across Continental Europe where he enjoyed success winning tournaments in Cannes, Paris, Lyon, Barcelona, Wiesbaden, Prague and Vienna cementing his reputation in the game attracting invitations to play exhibition matches and private events hosted by the aristocracy. One such event in which Anthony Wilding was invited took place at Sussex Lodge, Regents Park in London in 1912 making the front page of the *Tatler*. In the preceding year before the Roehampton event in 1914, Wilding had achieved a unique triple in the



TWO CHAMPIONS

MR. A. F. WILDING (TENNIS) AND MR. BASIL FORTER (RACQUETS)
Who took part in the interesting tennis tournament at Mrs. Hall-Walker's charming house at Sussex Lodge, Regent's Park, last week. Further photographs of this event are given on a subsequent page.



A. F. WILDING

world of tennis winning the World Hard Court Championships on clay in Paris, the World Grass Court Championships at Wimbledon and the World Covered Court Championships in Stockholm (wood surface). It came as no surprise that Wilding won the Men's Doubles event at Roehampton with his partner NE Brookes. Tragedy soon followed with the start of the First World War and Anthony Wilding was to join a long list of sporting heroes who were killed, missing in action or died as a result of the war thus depriving the world of a great talent and the opportunity of

playing again at Roehampton Club.

The next edition of the Roehampton Club *Recorder* will continue the story of the first Open Tennis Tournament at the Club including the winner of the Men's Singles.

Steve Riedlinger, Club Archivist

