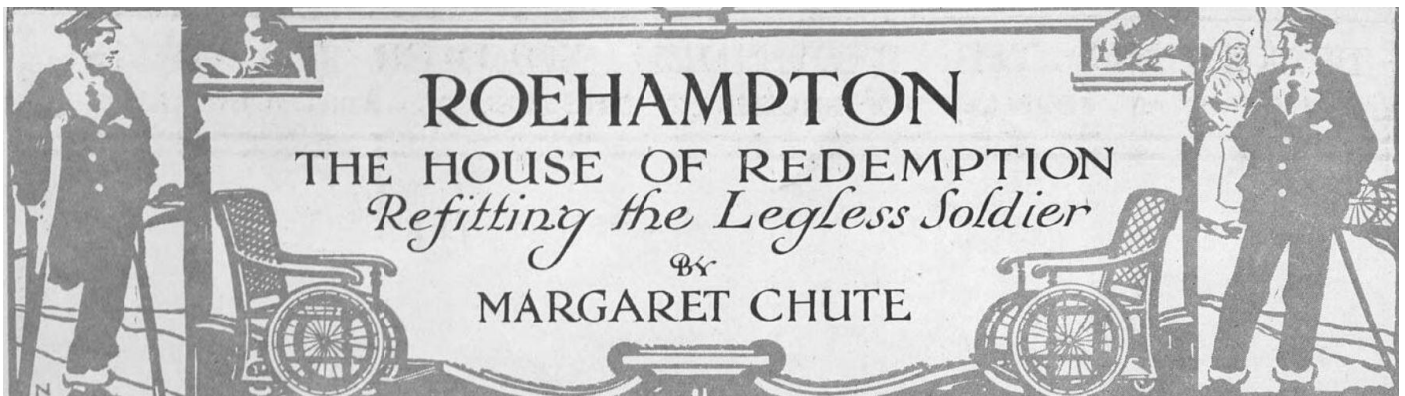


From the Archives

Roehampton House connection with Roehampton Club

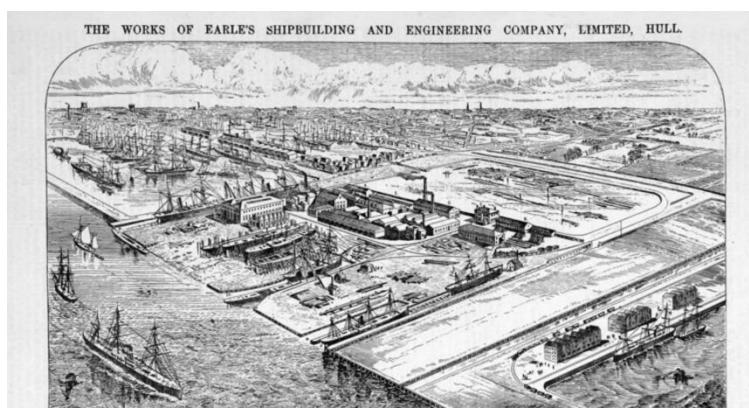
This impressive landmark in Roehampton Lane, which is now part of Queen Mary's Hospital has a distinguished history dating back to the early 1700's. Prior to becoming a world leading centre for the treatment of wounded soldiers in the First World War with missing limbs, the property was shown as the residential address for a particular Member of Roehampton Club with a background in the shipping industry. Most importantly, it was his decision to agree the use of the building for this purpose giving rise to a newspaper article at the time calling it 'The House of Redemption'.



E Kenneth Wilson was elected to the Club in May 1916 from this address. He was a descendant of Thomas Wilson who had started a shipping company in Hull in the 1820's. According to the Hull University Archives held at the Hull History Centre from which this article is derived, the activities of this single company helped to make Hull Britain's third largest port



by the beginning of the twentieth century.



By March 1904, Thomas Wilson & Sons Company (TWSC) owned at least 99 vessels built by the local firm of Earle's Shipbuilding and Engineering Company Limited which had been bought by TWSC shortly before.

In 1891, the company was registered as a limited liability concern with nearly all the shares owned by Thomas' two brothers Charles (Chairman) and Arthur (Deputy Chairman). Both individuals had made their mark in business and high society. Charles Wilson had married Florence Jane Helen Wellesley, daughter of Colonel WHC Wellesley, a descendant of the Duke of Wellington. In 1878, he bought a 300-acre estate called Warter Priory near Pocklington at the foot of the Yorkshire Wolds in the East Riding of Yorkshire and by the turn of the century he owned nearly 8000 acres with an estate near Balmoral. A chalet in Nice and a London home in Grosvenor Square.



He was Liberal MP for Hull between 1874-1906 and was created Baron Nunburnholme of Kingston-upon-Hull in 1906. He was succeeded as Chairman of TWSC by his younger brother Arthur Wilson who had also established himself as an important society figure in the region buying land at Tranby near Hull and building a mansion, Tranby Croft which was completed in 1876. He eventually owned some 3,000 acres, was Master of the Holderness Hunt, Sheriff of Hull in 188-89 and High Sheriff of Yorkshire in 1891. When he passed away in October 1909, the role of Chairman passed to his son E Kenneth Wilson with Charles Henry Wellesley Wilson, 2nd Lord Nunburnholme becoming Deputy Chairman.

Despite the growth of the business leading up to the outbreak of the First World War, there were disagreements behind the scenes and in 1916, the Chairman and Deputy Chairman indicated their desire to get out of the business. Details of the introduction of a prospective buyer for the Company called Ellerman point towards a 'shadowy' go between. Ellerman also had his roots in Hull as a major shipowner and other long-established interests in brewing, publishing, and property. The deal was eventually concluded on 13th November 1916 for a total of about £4.3m making Ellerman's Wilson Lines the biggest shipowner in the British Isles although the timing of the transaction could not have been better for the Wilson family with the advent of the Great War when vessels were lost at sea and the Government took over the British mercantile marine for the rest of the war at comparatively low rates of charter hire. Shipping companies at the time made poor returns with enormously increased costs, particularly insurance and even after the end of the war, the problems continued which required the company to announce large cuts in salary including senior management.

Ellerman died in July 1933 leaving a fortune estimated at between £37 and £40m. The second and last baronet also named Sir John Reeves Ellerman, was then 23 year's old and little known. His interests lay outside business and was a noted natural historian. He died after a heart attack in July 1973, leaving £52.3m, the largest fortune ever left in Britain at that time.

Steve Riedlinger – Club Archivist

