

# Club President Russell Evans 1922 - 2021



Russell Wilmot Evans was born on November 4th, 1922 in Birmingham and was educated at King Edward's School, Birmingham and the University of Birmingham. He passed away peacefully aged 98 at Kingston Hospital with his sons Mark and Neil and daughter Penny in attendance on 21st July 2021. He was always happy to remind everyone that Birmingham 'was at the centre of the Universe' but his heart lay in Wales, where both his parents came from and where his rugby allegiance lay.

Russell began his sporting career playing cricket at an early age at school and at home with his younger brother Lloyd. Cricket remained his full time hobby and passion. He was an accomplished all rounder batting right handed and bowling left handed. He went on to play for the Old Edwardians and the University of Birmingham. He also enjoyed playing Rugby and represented his school at wing forward and was also a keen cellist in the school orchestra. He only took up tennis and squash in later years and joined the Edgbaston Priory Club, Birmingham where he played with, among others, the legendary Ann Jones.

Too young for Oxford, he was accepted for Birmingham University at 16 to read Law and three years later, was commissioned as an Officer in the Durham Light Infantry and served in World War II in Egypt and Italy. During this period he was promoted to the rank of Major and was one of the youngest Majors serving in the British Army. Life expectancy for an infantry officer on the front line at that time was an average of just three weeks.

He received the Military Cross at the age of 23 for his determination, example and leadership in holding an important position in close contact with the enemy under sniper fire and mortar shells. He was recognised as taking command of his badly shaken Company which he rallied and steadied for four days until they were relieved. He then played a significant role in reforming the unit within a period of several months before leading the Company to take on the same enemy position with the loss of only one of his soldiers. The citation of his award for the Military Cross held in the National Archives mentions Captain Evans as being largely responsible for the success of this action and was also due to his 'leadership and dash, which surprised the enemy'. Russell was also asked to assist at the Nuremberg trials at the end of the war as he had received law training as part of his law degree.

After the war, while still with the DLI, he spent time in East Africa and was asked by the Army to stay on, but he wanted to return to civilian life and came home to qualify as a solicitor in 1949. He was appointed as Assistant Secretary to the Harry Ferguson company in 1951 involved in the manufacture of agricultural machinery. Following his role in the merger of Harry Ferguson and Massey-Harris, Russell resigned his position in 1962. This marked the beginning of a successful business career taking on several senior roles

in the City. He joined the Rank Organisation in 1967 as Deputy Secretary and was appointed Secretary in 1968 until 1972 when he became a Director rising to Managing Director from 1975-1982, Deputy Chairman from 1981-1982, Chairman 1982-1983. He was also a Director of several subsidiaries and other associated companies including Rank Xerox, Fuji Xerox and Southern Television. Other directorships included Eagle Star Holdings PLC 1982-1987, Chairman of Butlins 1975-1983, Rank City Wall 1976-1983, Oxford Economics Forecasting Limited in 1986 and Medical Cyclotron in 1988.

Russell's arrival in London in the early 1950s also prompted his search to continue playing tennis and squash at a suitable club and he considered Hurlingham and Roehampton Clubs as his best options. He decided on Roehampton Club and was elected to membership in November 1954. His application was proposed by Pamela Hayward who subsequently became his wife. He was devoted to Pamela and their subsequent family. Within two years of his arrival at the Club, Russell was appointed to the Tennis Sub Committee. He was Tennis Captain in 1957 serving on this Sub-Committee alongside his long-term friend and tennis adversary, Ian Worth whose name appears regularly on the Club's Tennis Honours Boards. There was a friendly bone of contention between Russell and Ian for as long as they knew each other, and they reminisced about their duels every Saturday lunchtime for decades in the Members Bar over a half pint. 'I could always beat Ian in practice, but he turned into a terrier on finals day each year and always pipped me ... so frustrating' Russell would say with a wink and smile. Russell could always claim to be the first name on the Honours Board ahead of Ian in 1958 being the first winner of the Men's Open Doubles Competition with his partner Keith Summerside and was Club Squash Champion and Captain 1960-61. He continued playing in tennis tournaments into his later years. In his retirement, Russell started playing more golf and enjoyed a weekly round for many years with a regular fourball and in more recent years, and well into his nineties, Russell continued to play Chess for the Club's team.

Russell's organisational skills on committee were quickly recognised by other senior members of the Club and he was asked to take on a role in the general running of the Club culminating in his appointment as Chairman and subsequently President of the Club in 1991 to the present day. It was during this time that Russell's immeasurable contribution to our Club was assured when he assumed a pivotal role in securing the Club's future with its transition from private ownership to becoming a Members' Club in 1989.

Russell loved watching sport after his playing days were over and he regularly attended the Club's tennis and squash club championships, often presenting the trophies with a kind word to all who took part. He opened many of the Club's new facilities and seeing all the families enjoying the new Outdoor Pool after he opened it in 2018 gave him great pleasure.

Russell lived a rich and fulfilling life in his love of sport, using his leadership skills for the benefit of others. Perhaps this is best summarised in the commendation he received for his Military Cross in the Second World War which reads as follows

'At all times in action, this Officer has shown complete disregard for his own personal safety and has by his example, steadiness and leadership been an inspiration to the men under his command'.

**As our President, you have been a complete inspiration to all Roehampton Club's Members for the past 67 years and we all owe you a huge debt of gratitude for whenever the Club needed to call upon your wisdom and leadership.**

Alan Jenkins  
Chairman  
28th July 2021

**Arrangements for Russell's funeral are currently being made and it is likely to take place at the end of August. Details will be published shortly but, in the meantime, please can the Evans family's privacy be respected at this time while they come to terms with their loss.**

**As a token of respect and for the debt of gratitude the Club owes its former President the Club's flags will remain at half mast in his honour until his funeral.**