

FROM THE ARCHIVES

BBC history at Roehampton Club in 1938

The *Club Centenary Book* by Elizabeth Hennessey refers to one of the BBC's earliest outside television broadcasts carried out from the Club over a three-day period from 13th to 16th July 1938. This featured a variety of sporting events including tennis lessons from the professional, an exhibition of archery by the boys of Shortenhill School, diving in the public pool, trick riding, cycle polo, croquet and a golf demonstration by AG Matthew who



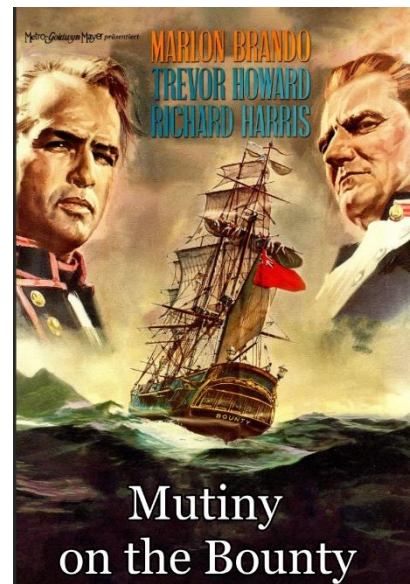
had taken over the role of Golf Professional from George Gadd in 1934. A special television set was provided by the BBC and was installed in the lounge of the clubhouse during the three days.

The host presenter for the outside broadcast at Roehampton Club was Jasmine Bligh. One of only two female presenters at the BBC recruited from more than 1,200 auditions. Her Wikipedia page refers to her as the niece of Esme Ivo Bligh, the ninth Earl of Darnley and mentioned in her biography at the National Portrait Gallery to be a descendant of Captain William Bligh, the commander famously portrayed in the film *Mutiny on the Bounty* by Trevor Howard with Marlon Brando as Fletcher Christian. Intending to begin her career as an actress, Jasmine Bligh met with some opposition from her mother before applying to the BBC at the age of 22 answering an advertisement for female hostess announcers – unmarried and without red hair. She was

taken on with Elizabeth Cowell and Leslie Mitchell and were seen regularly in test transmissions in 1936.

Jasmine Bligh became an established celebrity associated with the BBC and enjoyed a number of other engagements in which she announced a variety of other events such as the musical performances of Ivor Novello. She even took centre stage on more than one occasion when she was televised being carried by a fireman going down a 90-foot ladder from the top of the BBC Studios at Alexandra Palace and sitting in the sidecar of a motorcycle during a trick cycle demonstration. Arguably, she is best known for being the first person to appear on the BBC following the end of the Second World War with the immortal words 'Good afternoon, everybody. How are you? Do you remember me, Jasmine Bligh?'. This announcement was followed by a Mickey Mouse cartoon *Mickey's Gala Premier* that had been the last programme transmitted seven years earlier at the start of World War II.

According to one of the popular consumer magazines in 1938, there were approximately 6,000 TV sets in England in the summer of that year. The cost of the early television sets



encouraged the formation of neighbourhood community groups sharing the cost by installing this new technology into someone's home for all to see. Viewers in the same year were treated to several outside broadcasts during the month of April including the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race, the British Middleweight Boxing Match at Haringey and the England v Scotland International Football Match at Wembley. The pictures shown for the football match were described as 'startingly brilliant, so clear, so cleverly handled from the camera angle, that every move in the game could be followed with absolute ease. When it was over, people in the room who had not watched television programmes previously would turn to their host to say that if they could afford it, they would go out and buy a set and buy one today.

Steve Riedlinger, Club Archivist

