

# From the Archives – 18<sup>th</sup> December 2025

## *Boxing Day squash match at Roehampton Club*

### *100 years ago*



The 1925 Christmas holiday programme at Roehampton Club included a number of sporting and social events culminating on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day with a dinner, dance and bridge tournament with preceding competitions on 28th December.

The Club was understandably closed on Christmas Day but opened on Boxing Day to host the Monthly Medal and Ladies Putting Competition for golf Members.

A Partnership Day for bridge players was also arranged on the same day together with a squash match against the Royal Air Force Club with prizes presented by the Directors of the Club.

This was subsequently followed on Monday 28th December with a Flag competition and Mixed Foursomes competition for golfers together with a Partnership Day with First and Second Prizes awarded to the winners and runners up.



The squash match against the RAF Club represents one of the earliest matches played between different clubs following the standardisation of the court dimensions in 1923.

According to the history timeline of the sport in the World Squash Library, the English Squash Clubs had formed a sub-committee in that year which decided the standard size of the court and set the height of the tin.

This follows the earlier move by the US Squash Federation to standardise its 'narrow courts' in 1920.

By 1928, the sub committee at the Tennis and Rackets Association separated itself to become the Squash Rackets Association.

In August 1919, *The Evening News* featured an article announcing the successful conclusion of negotiations to establish a permanent home for the Royal Air Force Club at 128 Piccadilly, which had previously housed the Cavalry Club and before that (from 1905), the Ladies Lyceum Club.

The article goes on to reveal that Lord Cowdray had been instrumental in completing negotiations to acquire permanent premises for the RAF Club, providing £100,000 (equivalent to approximately £7.7m in today's money).

# The Evening News

London's Predominant Evening Journal. Largest Net Sale in the United Kingdom.

LONDON: WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 20, 1919.

## FLYING MEN'S NEW HOME.

### Club House in Piccadilly and Flats in Park-lane.

Flying officers, past and present, will, in the near future be in possession of club premises second to none in London. *The Evening News* learns that the negotiations started by Lord Cowdray for the acquisition of permanent premises for the Royal Air Force Club have been concluded.

Lord Cowdray has given £100,000 towards the scheme, which provides for:—

A club house in Piccadilly (next to the Cavalry Club).

Two houses in Park-lane (which are to be converted into flats).

A third house in Park-lane.

A large garage in Grantham-place, with a back entrance into the club.

The present R.A.F. Club headquarters in Bruton-street will be removed as soon as possible.

As soon as the membership is sufficient to justify the necessary outlay, it is proposed to reconstruct the acquired buildings.

Features of the new club will include a complete set of rooms for the entertainment of women guests, squash racquet courts, and a winter garden.

All officers who hold or have held commissions in the R.N.A.S., R.F.C., or Royal Air Force are eligible for membership.

The subscription is to be five guineas for the first 600 members, seven guineas for the next thousand, and ten guineas for all further elected candidates up to the number that can be accommodated. An entrance fee will be imposed upon any member elected to fill vacancies.

The donation funded the acquisition of multiple properties that would form the club's headquarters. Two houses in Park Lane were to be converted into flats for members. One property was Number 6 Park Lane, which had been used as livery yards and carriage stables. A third house in Park Lane provided additional residential accommodation, while a large garage in Grantham Place with a back entrance into the Club offered modern amenity for the motoring age.

The article also outlines ambitious membership plans, with eligibility extended to all officers who held or had held commissions in the RNAS (Royal Naval Air Service), RFC (Royal Flying Corps), or Royal Air Force. The subscription structure was carefully designed with the first 600 members paying three guineas, the next thousand paying seven guineas, and all further elected candidates up to capacity paying ten guineas. Significantly, an entrance fee would be imposed upon any member elected to fill vacancies.

The new club would feature a complete set of rooms for entertaining women guests, squash racquet courts, and a winter garden – facilities designed to make it competitive with the finest London clubs. Despite the financial contribution made by Lord Cowdray in 1918, the negotiations and property acquisitions took nearly a year to complete before the reconstruction work took place between 1919 and 1921. The Club eventually opened to members on 2 January 1922, with the formal opening ceremony conducted by Group Captain the Duke of York (later King George VI) on 24 February 1922.

Previous articles in the Roehampton Club Recorder have referred to the use of the club during the First World War as a training ground for the aerial artillery observers preparing themselves for their hazardous existence tethered to the ground in kite balloons in close proximity to enemy trenches and heavy gunfire. Officers from the Royal Naval Air Service and the Royal Flying Corps were also stationed near the Club at Grove House and Richmond Park respectively shortly before their amalgamation to become the RAF.

Given these close connections which took place in the build-up to the Boxing Day Squash match, it is more than likely that there were members who were subsequently involved in both clubs and fully deserve our thanks for the sacrifices they made for the Christmas celebrations we now enjoy.

**Steve Riedlinger, Club Archivist**