

From the Archives – 19th June 2026

Curious chronicles from Roehampton Club



The British **NEWSPAPER** **Archive**

Club reflects on its 125 celebrations.

The *British Newspaper Archive* contains more than 1500 articles about Roehampton Club dating back to its origins in the early 1900s.

They cover a rich portrayal of sporting and society events at the Club together with prominent Member biographies. The following extracts reveal an unexpected side of life at Roehampton as the

Danger at the gates: the suffragette assault of 1913

Few episodes in the Club's history can have startled Members quite as sharply as the events of spring 1913. *The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* reported that Olive Hockin – a prominent suffragette activist – made Roehampton Club the target of a protest that formed part of the wider militant campaign then gripping the country. The Club's peaceful lawns and courts, associated in the public mind with leisured refinement, were an incongruous backdrop for political disruption. It serves as a reminder that the great social upheavals of the Edwardian era reached even the most secluded of London's sporting retreats.



Many sports but no polo: the Club in wartime, 1915

By the spring of 1915, Roehampton Club presented a rather muted picture. *The Morning Post* noted with some poignancy that beyond a brief 'knock up or so among the officers of the Hussars,' the polo grounds stood entirely idle. Most of the polo-playing membership had gone to the front, and the committee had from the outset discouraged play out of respect for the gravity of the moment. Yet the Club did not shut its doors. Tennis, croquet and golf continued, giving the grounds a curiously peaceful appearance while the world beyond was anything but. It is a touching detail: Roehampton Club carrying on, quietly, for those who remained.



Taking to the skies: aerial golf at Roehampton Club, 1926

If the war brought an enforced austerity, the roaring twenties brought something altogether more exhilarating. In July 1926, the Club hosted what the *Liverpool Daily Post* described as 'aerial golf' – a flying day at which aircraft landed and performed on or near the Club's grounds. *The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* also covered the occasion, and the images suggest it was a spectacle that attracted considerable

attention. One of the participants in the event was Lady Heath regarded at the time as a famous aviator and parachutist. One can only imagine the scene: Members in flannels and summer hats craning their

necks skyward as biplanes circled the fairways. Aviation was still a novelty to most Britons, and the fact that Roehampton Club embraced it so enthusiastically speaks well of the Club's sense of adventure.

Hérons in the goldfish pond: a persistent pest, 1928

More prosaic, but no less entertaining, was a brief note in the *Richmond Herald* of September 1928 recording that herons had taken to raiding the goldfish pond at the Club. The incident is reported with a straight face, but it is hard not to smile at the image of Club staff – or perhaps the Secretary himself – engaged in an undignified stand-off with a succession of imperturbable grey herons. Nature, it seems, has always found Roehampton Club's grounds as attractive as Members do.

Hitchcock at the Garden Party, 1950

Few Club events can claim a connection to the golden age of Hollywood, but Roehampton Club's annual Theatrical Garden Party – held in aid of the Actors' Orphanage – achieved just that in 1950. The celebrated director Alfred Hitchcock attended and was filmed on the Club's grounds, the footage forming part of a film production that was subsequently noted in the *Picturegoer* publication, *Tatler* and several other national publications. The garden party itself was a fixture that drew a glittering cast of theatrical names across many seasons; in 1949 alone it was covered by *The Stage*, *The Illustrated London News* and *The Sphere*. That Hitchcock should have found Roehampton Club's atmosphere sufficiently cinematic to incorporate into his work is a distinction the Club can wear with some pride.



Gwen takes stout for training: the Gold Cup, 1966

Perhaps the most delightfully deadpan headline in the archive belongs to the *Daily Express* of April 1966, which reported that Mrs Gwen Bandom – winner of the Roehampton Gold Challenge Cup that year – credited her success in part to stout as part of her training regimen. *The Daily Mirror* meanwhile hailed her as 'golf's mighty atom'. Whether the stout was medicinal, motivational, or simply enjoyed at the nineteenth hole is left tantalisingly unclear. Mrs Bandom was not the first remarkable woman to triumph at Roehampton Club: Pam Barton won the same Gold Cup in 1935 to considerable national fanfare, and Cecil Leitch carried off the Gold Challenge Cup in 1928 – both celebrated in the press with a warmth that reflected the Gold Cup's standing as one of the premier events in the ladies' amateur calendar.

King Alfonso and the gatecrasher, 1929

The first British Empire Garden Party, held at Roehampton in July 1929, drew an extraordinary guest list, including King Alfonso XIII of Spain – photographed in a bowler hat watching polo – and representatives from across the dominions. Yet even this grand occasion was not without incident: *The Daily Mirror* ran a headline on 11th July 1929 that referred simply to a 'gatecrasher', suggesting that the spectacle attracted at least one uninvited admirer. Given that the assembled company included royalty and colonial dignitaries, the audacity of such a visitor rather adds to the occasion's colour.

From suffragettes to Alfred Hitchcock, from aerial golf to heron-bothering, the Roehampton Club's past — as revealed in the pages of the British Newspaper Archive — is considerably livelier than its serene grounds might suggest. These stories are a reminder that our long established Club is, above all, a stage on which the drama of its times is played out.

Steve Riedlinger, Club Archivist