

From the Archives – 16th July 2026

Anniversary events 100 years ago



Golf

In the high summer of 1926, Roehampton Club golf professional George Gadd was some 400 miles to the north, testing himself against the finest players in Britain. His stage was Gleneagles, and the occasion was the Glasgow Herald Thousand Guineas Golf Tournament — the richest and most glamorous professional fixture of the era.

The tournament had begun in 1920 with a purse of £650, at the time 'the largest ever' in British golf. From 1921 the Glasgow newspaper raised the stakes to a full thousand guineas – £1,050 – a record that gave the event its enduring name and dwarfed the rewards on offer elsewhere; the winner's £200 was nearly three times what the Open champion collected in 1921. Played each year on the King's Course at Gleneagles, it drew the whole aristocracy of the professional game – Duncan, Mitchell, Compston, Havers, Boomer – and even served, through its famous 1921 Anglo-American international challenge match, as a spiritual forerunner of the Ryder Cup.

The format was demanding: two rounds of stroke-play qualifying to whittle a large field down to the leading players, followed by knockout match play, with the closing rounds fought over a gruelling thirty-six holes. Roehampton Club's man rose to the challenge. Gadd opened with a 75 and followed that with a 76, just enough to barely qualify for the match play stage of the tournament.

Then came the draw, and with it one of those encounters that period newspapers relished. In the first round of match play – reported by *The Evening News* of London on 1st July 1926 under the headline 'Golf at Gleneagles: George Gadd Beaten by Surprise Player of the Open' – Gadd was paired with Tom Barber of Cavendish Golf Club, freshly celebrated in the newspapers as 'the discovery of the Open Championships' after his fine week at Royal Lytham.

The report in the newspaper confirmed that Tom Barber had 'played astonishing golf against a more experienced opponent in George Gadd, beating the Roehampton Club professional by the big margin of 5 and 3'. The Cavendish man 'reached the turn in the remarkably low figure of 33', and the correspondent judged it 'splendid work on the part of Gadd to be only one down at that stage' – the Roehampton Club professional even holding a fifteen-yard putt at the 9th for a winning three. But there was no holding Barber on the homeward journey: 'Coming home, Barber played devastating golf, against which the Roehampton Club player could not survive'. So relentless was the assault that, the paper noted, under stroke conditions Barber 'might have made a record, as he was round in five under fours when the game terminated on the 15th green'.

There was no shame in the defeat. This was, after all, the same Tom Barber who had taken Walter Hagen to the 21st hole in 1923 and who would finish tied fifth in that very year's Open at Lytham – and the two men had genuine history, Barber having edged Gadd by a single hole in the 1924 News of the World Matchplay semi-final. The 1926 result was less a giant-killing than the latest instalment of a well-matched rivalry.

Croquet

In the summer of 1926, with the polo grounds thronging with spectators and the tennis courts in full swing, it would have been easy to overlook the quieter corner of Roehampton Club, where the mallets were at work. Yet that July, croquet claimed a moment of genuine glory – and a correspondent from the *London Daily Chronicle*, visiting on 7th July, was moved to record his surprise.

‘It seems a long way from polo to croquet’, he wrote, ‘and some people imagine that the game which one-time humorists linked with curates and old maids is entirely dead’. The reality was very much otherwise: croquet was ‘very much alive, and gathering increased popularity’. What struck him most was the crowd — ‘the number of spectators round the croquet courts surprised me’.

The full Championship meeting

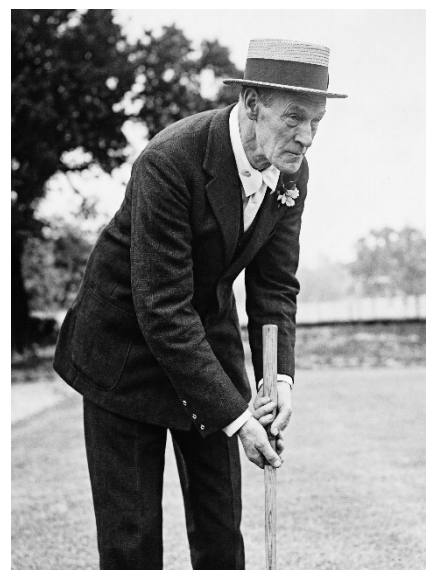
There was good reason for the throng, for Roehampton Club was that year the home of the game's most important gathering. Over two weeks in late June and early July, the Club staged the complete Croquet Championship meeting. The contemporary *Croquet Gazette* confirms the pattern precisely: the Men's and Women's Championships were played in the opening week, commencing 28th June, with the Open Championships following in the second week from 5th July – all at Roehampton Club).

This was no accident of scheduling. From 1902 until 1959 the headquarters of the Croquet Association were based at Roehampton Club, and the Club regularly hosted the sport's leading events – the Opens, the Men's and Women's Championships and the President's Cup among them. For the inter-war croquet world, Roehampton Club was, quite simply, the centre of things.

One man drew the crowds

The gallery, however, had assembled to see a single player. ‘There was a notable ‘swell’ in the attendance of lookers-on when Cyril Corbally was playing’, the *Chronicle* noted, ‘a tribute to the return to the courts of a great favourite in the croquet world’. He was, the paper explained, ‘an Irishman, with a delightful estate near Dublin’, who ‘is seldom seen in London’ and who ‘has been absent from the croquet courts for some years owing to ill health’.

The excitement was entirely warranted, for Corbally was one of the greatest players the game has known. Cyril Francis Corbally (1880–1946), of Rathbeale, Swords, in County Dublin, had dominated the Edwardian era, winning the Open Championship five times – in 1902, 1903, 1906, 1908 and 1913 – and lifting the Champion Cup, forerunner of today's President's Cup, in 1913. At home he took the Championship of Ireland four times between 1901 and 1911. He belonged, too, to a celebrated cluster of Irish players who introduced the revolutionary ‘Irish style’, swinging the mallet between the legs rather than across the body – a technique that reshaped the sport.



The comeback crowned

After years away through illness, Corbally chose Roehampton Club for his return – and marked it in the finest possible manner. In the opening week of the meeting he won the Men's Championship, the one and only Men's title of his long career, to set alongside his five Open crowns. The *Croquet Gazette* of 10th July 1926 recorded the outcome, noting the all-Irish final in which Corbally overcame his compatriot Duff Mathews. It was a story the press could hardly resist: a returning master, long absent, reclaiming a championship before an admiring crowd on the Club's own lawns.

Roehampton Club's place in the game

For the Club's history, the episode is doubly telling. It confirms that in July 1926 Roehampton Club was not merely dabbling in croquet but hosting the sport's national championships – and providing the stage on which one of its genuine legends chose to reappear. And it underlines the standing the Club held across the inter-war years, when its lawns and its links to the Croquet Association placed it at the very heart of the English game. The reporter who came expecting a dying pastime left with a rather different impression. Watching the crowds gather for Cyril Corbally, he had witnessed not the twilight of croquet but one of its brightest afternoons – and it had unfolded, fittingly, at Roehampton Club.

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