

From the Archives – 15th October 2026

Roehampton Club and the General Strike 100 years ago



The General Strike of 1926 was one of the most significant episodes of industrial unrest in British history. It began on 3rd May 1926 and lasted nine days, bringing much of the country's transport, manufacturing and essential services to a standstill. The strike originated in a dispute within the British coal industry. Following the First World War, declining coal exports, foreign competition and outdated mining infrastructure had weakened the industry. Mine owners proposed reducing miners' wages and increasing working hours to maintain profitability.

In 1925, Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin's Conservative government temporarily subsidised miners' wages while a Royal Commission investigated the industry. When the subsidy expired, mine owners insisted on imposing worse employment conditions. The Miners' Federation refused, adopting the slogan 'Not a penny off the pay, not a minute on the day'. The Trades Union Congress (TUC) called a general strike in support of the miners.

Approximately 1.7 million workers initially joined the strike, including railwaymen, dockers, printers, transport workers and workers in heavy industry. Railway services were severely disrupted, buses and trams became scarce, newspapers ceased publication or appeared in reduced editions, and deliveries of food and other goods were interrupted. The government recruited thousands of volunteers to maintain essential services, while the armed forces were placed on standby. When the Trades Union Congress (TUC) called out the workers, the British government mobilized contingency networks to keep essential services running. While university students and young upper-middle-class men were famously dispatched to drive buses, pilot steam engines, and unload ships at the London docks, society women played an active role in logistics and welfare. Whitehall, Horse Guards Parade, and Hyde Park were turned into massive staging and supply depots.

Aristocratic figures like Lady Raglan and her companions organized field canteens and tea stalls to sustain police officers, troops, and volunteer drivers throughout the nine-day standoff. The attached image shows Lady Raglan and other high society figures operating a food station beside the Cadiz Memorial on Horse Guards Parade. The second photograph shows another notable press image from a French news agency showing a policeman sitting alongside a volunteer bus driver on his way to Aldwych from Notting Hill Gate.



Police escorts were required to help protect transport vehicles from stone-throwing, jeering crowds and physical blockades. Barbed wire was also used around the front of the bus to stop strikers and pickets from cutting the ignition wires, disabling the radiator caps, slashing tyres or pulling the drivers from the cabs. The volunteers were among the thousands of undergraduate students (mainly from Oxford and Cambridge) together with young professionals and private motorists organised by the government to form the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies (OMS), to keep London moving.

The government also published its own newspaper, *The British Gazette*, edited by Roehampton Club Member, Winston Churchill to counter the TUC's *British Worker*. Despite occasional violence and confrontations, much of the strike remained peaceful. On 12th May 1926, the TUC called off the strike without securing concessions for the miners, who continued their dispute alone until November.

The strike caused the postponement of the Peel Memorials Croquet tournament at Roehampton Club - normally the curtain raiser for the croquet season at the Club but in 1926, the season had begun in the middle of a national emergency and the event was moved to October. The tournament carried the name of Walter Peel (1847-1897), three times champion in 1868, 1870 and 1871, whose fondness for knocking a partner ball through its hoop gave the game the word 'peeling'.

In 1896 Peel brought England's scattered players together in a single body, the United All England Croquet Association, renamed the Croquet Association in 1900, and became its first secretary (World Croquet Federation Hall of Fame). He died on 27 October 1897, twelve days after the Association's first committee meeting in South Kensington (Oxford Croquet history). His colleagues responded with two handicap cups, one for men and one for women, first played for in 1898.

Over the years Peels became the event that 'regularly open[s] the season at Roehampton', as the *Croquet Gazette* of 1961 put it. The General Strike began at midnight on 3rd May and lasted until 12th May (The National Archives). Croquet felt it immediately. The Woking tournament, under way on 3rd May, could not be finished, and the *Croquet Gazette* of 15th May carried an 'Emergency Notice': the Peels were cancelled, the venue of the Association's annual meeting had changed, and the *Croquet Gazette* itself was suspended. Two issues, those of 8th and 22nd May, were never printed. The annual meeting at Southampton Row on 11th May did no more than elect a Council and adjourn, as the *Croquet Gazette* index for 1926 records. By 29th May, when the *Croquet Gazette* appeared again, a solution was already in print. A letter signed 'R. Brooke' announced that the Peel Memorials of 1926 were now planned for the week of 11th October. This was Lt Col Reginald Brooke, elected a croquet member of Roehampton Club on 31 January 1903 and a regular correspondent on the Club's tournaments that summer. The date was confirmed in July.

Even so, it was a gamble. The Peels would now come at the very end of the calendar, after the Eastbourne fortnight at Devonshire Park, when the light faded early and many players had already put their mallets away. The gamble paid off. The *Croquet Gazette* of 16th October hailed a 'record entry of 183 for new date', and its report of the week confirmed 183 competitors. Between games, the players also found time to found something new. The Croquet Association Chess Circle was formed at the Peels, with members invited to join through C. D. Locock, a former British Amateur Chess champion and a well-known writer on croquet. The Peel Memorials are still played today, one of the oldest fixtures in the croquet calendar, for trophies dating back to 1898 (Talking Croquet, March 2026). In the autumn of 1926, Roehampton Club's lawns gave them their biggest field yet.

