

From the Archives

Fifty years of sport by Colonel Miler – part xi

Colonel Edward Darley Miller was one of the three brothers who founded Roehampton Club in 1901. In 1923, he published a retrospective account of his sporting career over a period of 50 years and the people he met along the way.

The book was serialised in the Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News Magazine from January to April in the same year. The newspaper articles provide a fascinating insight into his upbringing and the many notable characters he admired with many of them recruited into Roehampton Club.

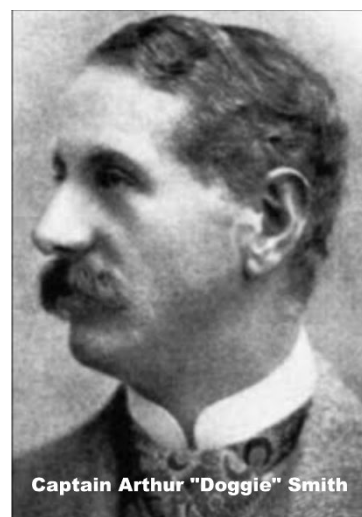


In the last edition of the newsletter, reference was made to the Colonel's move into Surrey and his associations with the Nickalls family home at Patteson Court where he spent much of his time. Major Pat Nickalls, DSO, Lt-Col Cecil Nickalls DSO, and Capt Morres Nickalls MC all became early members of Roehampton Club and played their part in the recruitment of other notable members.

The continuing story of the Colonel's recollections of his time in Surrey goes on to mention his hunting experiences, his involvement with local cricket and his polo adventures. He also met various individuals on the way which he highlights in his writing. Those joining him in the Surrey hunt were small in numbers, seldom more than thirty or forty regular participants.

One day, a stranger appeared wearing ordinary clothes who showed them all a clean pair of heels in a long and fast gallop over intricate areas of Surrey countryside. Everyone was asking who he was, and all they could find out was that he said his name was 'Smith'. Subsequently, they discovered it was the celebrated Captain Arthur 'Doggie' Smith who was one of the best steeplechase riders of the day. During his career as a steeplechaser, he finished third on a horse called Zoedone in the 1882 Grand National and won the National Hunt Chase on four occasions between 1864 and 1880.

After 20 successful years of steeplechase riding, he gave it up to devote himself entirely to hunting. He was asked how he compared the two sports, which he summed up in the following way 'I loved to ride and would go any distance to ride any horse in the steeplechase. Of the two, however, I think I like hunting best. Nothing in my opinion, can beat a good place in a good run over a good country and on a good horse. And in hunting if you don't get a good place there is no one disappointed but



yourself'. The Colonel thought that this was the best description of fox hunting that he had ever heard.

Cricket was the next sport that the Colonel refers to in his time in Surrey. In the summer holidays, he played a great many matches for the Betchworth Village Club with his two brothers, who were useful cricketers – especially George who was in the Marlborough XI and was a good slow bowler. Other friends from his time at Harrow and Cambridge were added to the team and the Colonel enjoyed a successful summer in 1885 playing against clubs in Dorking, Reigate, Redhill, Ashted, and Godalming.

Unfortunately, it was also a sad year for him with the passing of his father and he decided to go into the Army. He left Cambridge to go to Aldershot where he passed his examinations within six months and was gazetted to the 17th Lancers in September 1886. While waiting for his Gazette, he enjoyed a trip to America in which he had joined some friends playing cricket for a team called 'The Gentlemen of England'. The cricket eleven included a number of well-known players of the day.

He visited the United States on four subsequent occasions to play polo and had always experienced 'the greatest kindness and unbounded hospitality in that country'. It was during these visits that the Colonel met other polo players such as Foxhall Keene, who went on to join Roehampton Club before going on to become captain of the American team against a team led by the Duke of Westminster and managed by the Colonel.



Pursuing his career in the Army, the Colonel missed the summer term of 1885 at Cambridge to join the 4th Battalion of the South Staffordshire Regiment of Militia and went to Lichfield for two months recruit drill and one month's training. The adjutant of the regiment who had enlisted the Colonel was his uncle, Jack Darley, later of the 5th Fusiliers, then a major in the 38th. He was also well known in India in the early 1870's as a steeplechase rider.

It was during his time at Lichfield that the Colonel travelled a few miles to Barton-under-Needwood to watch a number of notable polo players which included John Reid Walker who became a breeder of polo ponies and racehorses – two of which went on to win back-to-back Gold Cups at Ascot in 1928 and 1929. His brother, William Walker, 1st Baron Wavertree was also a breeder of racehorses and was responsible in 1916 for gifting his entire bloodstock to the British Government to create the National Stud which is now based at Newmarket.

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