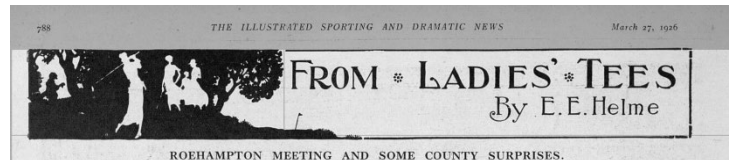


## Looking back at the Ladies Open Golf Gold Challenge Cup

The competition was held for the first time in 1926 and was reported at length by the leading lady golf journalist at the time, Eleanor Helme in the Illustrated Sporting & Dramatic News. Ms Helme has been featured in a previous edition of the Recorder in which her own golfing career was highlighted together with her regular visits to the Club, which she obviously enjoyed with complimentary reports on each of these occasions. Her legacy in Surrey Golf has been enshrined with the use of her name for the winners of the Helme Shield.

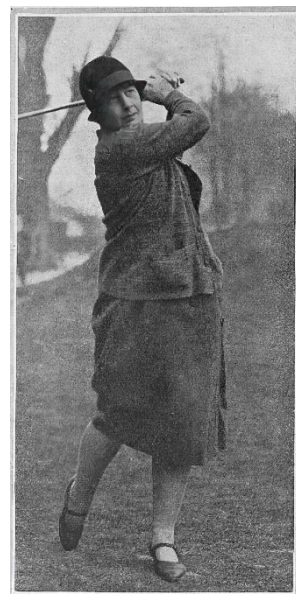


*Eleanor Helme*

In her report for the inaugural event, she makes a point in saying that this was also the first Open event for the season and was destined to become one of the most coveted challenge trophies. Despite these high expectations, the scoring was described as below standard considering the quality of the field which included many of the golfing giants of ladies' golf. Facing a par of seventy-five, these players were at least expected to break eighty and were found wanting.

Miss Molly Gourlay for example was on course to reach this target without a problem until she encountered problems with her putting resulting in a score of eighty-four. This was a surprising outcome from a player who had already won the Surrey County Ladies Competition and the French Ladies Open Championship at Chantilly. Ms Gourlay's career followed that of Eleanor Helme making a name for herself as a golf journalist, administrator for Surrey Golf and perhaps most of all being recognised as the first female golf course architect.

The eventual winner, however, of this first event was Mrs RJ McNair who had found fame as a tennis player before golf. Her performance in the competition was a curious mix of good, bad, and indifferent scoring to such an extent that she had no idea that she was even in the running to come out on top. Like most of the other players in the field before going out to play, she thought that at least a score in the seventies was on the cards. She thought that her hopes had been dashed straightaway with a disastrous score of eight shots on the second hole but then set about retrieving the situation with a courageous display getting back to level par at the turn. Aiming to get close to the par of thirty-five on the way home, she missed a number of short-range putts threatening all the good work from the front nine but managed to steady the ship finishing with a score of forty-two shots giving her what she thought was a respectful overall score of eighty-two which turned out to be the winning total by one shot.



*Mrs RJ McNair*

Over the course of the many years that followed, the scores have improved dramatically as was the case with the record-breaking scores of the last two years. The competition has involved an impressive list of the best lady players including Miss Cecil Leitch, Miss Enid

Wilson, Miss Pam Barton, and Miss Ann Irwin. The last of these two players have won this competition four and six times respectively. The only Roehampton Club member to win the competition was Miss Carol Archer in 1964.

The Gold Cup was presented by Mrs Miller (wife of Lt Col ED Miller – one of the three brothers responsible for the founding of the Club in 1901) in 1933. Unfortunately, it was stolen from the home of one of the winners but was replaced by an old silver polo cup which was plated in gold. The event will celebrate its centenary at the same time as the 125 Anniversary of the Club in 2026.

**Steve Riedlinger, Club Archivist**



*Miss Carol Archer*