

From the Archives – 18th May

After the Ball: Merry Memoirs of a Golfer by Eleanor Helme

Following on from the recent article on the Gold Cup at Roehampton Club, the following item refers to multi-talented journalist, Eleanor Helme who reported and played in the event. She was a regular visitor to the Club with complimentary references to the quality of the golf course and the efficient organisation of the many tournaments hosted by the Club.

She played club hockey and achieved a single-figure golf handicap at Leatherhead Golf Club. She was a stalwart of Ladies Golf taking on the administration of the game in her later years for the County of Surrey. Her contribution to Surrey Golf is recognised to this day with the naming of the Helme Shield competition.



THE HELME CHALLENGE SHIELD

Presented to Surrey Ladies' County Golf Association by Miss Eleanor Helme, SLCGA Captain 1920 and 1923, SLCGA President 1929-1946.

It was originally awarded to the Surrey club whose members submitted the 4 best net scores in the SLCGA Spring and Autumn Meetings. Following the re-organisation of competitions staged within the county, the Helme Challenge Shield competition became obsolete. It was then decided to award this prestigious trophy to the winners of the Derry Cup Plate Competition and it is being competed for between the Surrey clubs to this day. The first winners in the Spring of 1923 were Worplesdon followed by St George's Hill that Autumn. From 1962 it was awarded to the Club whose members submitted the 4 best net scores in the SLCGA Spring Meetings, and has been presented to the winners of the Derry Cup Competition since 2012.



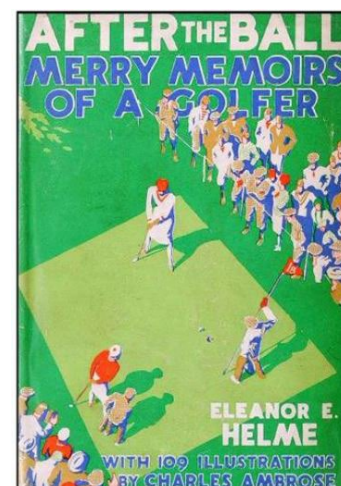
The picture upper right shows The Priory Golf Club team, winners of the Helme Shield for the four best net scores at the Surrey Spring 1932 meeting. Left to right: Mrs. MacEwan, Mrs. Bricc, Mrs. West, and Mrs. Bontor.
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In 1929 she published a book which she described as 'a frivolous chronicle of twenty three years of good fun in pursuit of the little white ball with note-book and pencil'. She goes on to say that it was not intended as a learned dissertation on the position of the left elbow at the top of the back swing or the exact angle of the right big toe compared with the line of flight. Nor was it an account of her personal journey as an infant in the mechanics of the game which enabled her to get down to a 1 handicap.

As many players know, the story of a game of golf is unlikely to excite those of us who were not there and even those who were there to witness the game themselves. The book captures the very essence of the sport and its enjoyment with more than a hundred illustrations provided by fellow golfer Charles Ambrose.

She cleverly conveys the various elements of this addictive sport in the form of 'cheerful gatherings' alongside other moments of pure delight capturing the very personal nature of this unique individual sport. Her writing style is engaging and manages to deliver a realistic account of what makes the game so popular.

At the time she was playing and writing about the game, ladies golf was very much in the shadows of a male-dominated society. It was left to others to rightfully campaign for equal status as she simply went about highlighting her own observations outside of the changing political climate.



Against this background, the book by Eleanor Helme stays true in her commentary and the excitement derived from hitting a little white ball. Her recollections of Roehampton Club are written in the context of the emergence of Ladies Golf following the introduction of the rubber-cored golf ball allowing greater distances for the average player. This watershed moment was recognised by Eleanor Helme as a critical time for the world at large to take Ladies Golf more seriously and for ladies themselves to realise their potential and change their attitudes where necessary.

By way of example, she makes reference to the characteristics of a certain type of lady golfer at senior level who carries firm convictions that her best golf is played after tea. In keeping with this arrangement and if playing in a tournament competition in which she was required to tee off at midday, finding it necessary to get out of bed early to partake of breakfast at 6am with lunch at 9am, tea at 11.30am and defeat by 2pm. Roehampton Club is favoured several times throughout the book with its proximity to the now defunct Ranelagh Club and the emergence of various competitions hosted at Roehampton.

Steve Riedlinger, Club Archivist