

Ladies Golf at Roehampton Club by Eleanor Helme

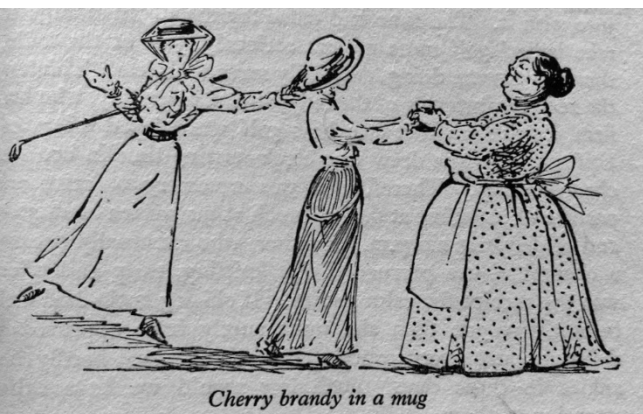
Eleanor Helme has been featured previously in the Recorder. She was a prominent journalist for the *Britannia and Eve* magazine reporting on Ladies Golf in the early years of the Club. Mention has already been made of her golfing prowess as a low single figure player at Leatherhead Golf Club and her lifelong contribution to the game recognised by Surrey Golf to this day with the playing of the Helme Shield.

Her writing was engaging and easy to read. She managed to highlight her enjoyment of the game she loved and the characters and events associated with major tournaments, not only to those involved with the game at all levels, but to those interested in the environment in which it is played and its addictive qualities.

She also found a way of expelling the myth that golf was a selfish individual sport. Admittedly, there were those who were driven to excel and use all of their available time to practice every aspect of the game at the expense of their social lives and the company of others. But Eleanor chose to focus her writing on the majority of players who found enduring friendships even in the most competitive struggles to win a single match or a tournament competition held over several days.

She also relates the unique experience of team golf and the various means of selection for ladies representing their county for the first time. It seems that county golf only began after the Open Championship in 1893 and even then the number of matches played would depend entirely on the selected players and whether they had the time or the money to engage on long journeys across the country.

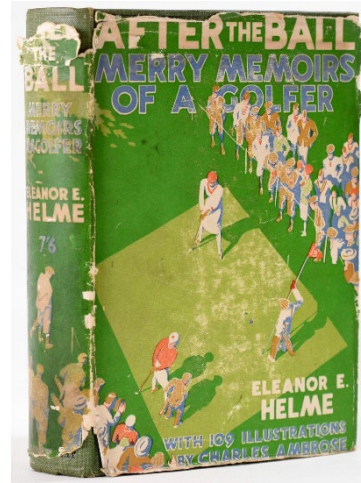
She goes on to describe her personal experience in 1906 when she made her first appearance for the Surrey team. Given her age at the time and in keeping with the nature of family upbringing at the turn of the twentieth century, maternal permission was necessarily obtained. Not only did they have to seek the permission of their mothers, but they were also likely to face a round of golf with the respective Captain of the team to fully appreciate the solitude and challenges of team golf.



Eleanor remembers her initial trial played in a downpour on the top of the Epsom Downs when an over-zealous club caretaker came out on the course to offer us cherry brandy in a mug to counteract the ill effects of the weather. Just as Eleanor was considering this kind offer, the captain intervened and 'admonished the frightened flapper from drinking at all' which Eleanor saw at the time as another maternal blessing.



This account of her selection for the Surrey team in the early days of county golf appears in her book *After the Ball*, also mentioned in the previous newsletter. It also includes one of 109 illustrations by Charles Ambrose capturing the event. We can only speculate on how this experience compares with the most recently selected lady member at Roehampton invited to play for Surrey.



Along with many anecdotes of her career as a golfer and journalist, Eleanor Helme mentions Roehampton Club no less than nine times in her book starting with the Ladies Open Golf Scratch Challenge Cup quoting 'Roehampton of the glittering gold cup to which in my palmy days I dared to aspire'.

She goes on to make a comparison with another local golf club (now defunct) in which she says that Roehampton Club is or was a relatively short course and it lacks those alien influences of bandstands and the like which make Ranelagh disquieting. She continues her analysis of the course by saying that the 'air of simplicity about Roehampton is deceitful'.

By way of illustration as to her pride in achieving one of her better rounds at the Club when she used her winnings to purchase a pair of gold sleeve links as a reminder of what can be done with the courage of despair engraving on one, the score for the outgoing half and on the other the incoming. The outgoing was 48 and the incoming was 33. Unfortunately, she went on to say that she lost the link showing the score of 33 but retained the 48 which she subsequently regards as a sad allegory of the downward path of her golf.

Playing herself in the Roehampton Gold Cup on several occasions with her best placed finish as second, she refers to the links as the only gold at Roehampton Club that she ever held.

Steve Riedlinger, Club Archivist