

From the Archives – 27th July Croquet at Roehampton Club 100 years ago

The first meeting of the Croquet Sub-Committee took place in February 1905 under the chairmanship of Lord Doneraile. He continued in this role for the next eighteen years and chaired the meeting held at Roehampton Club in May 1923. By this time, he had acquired the title of Viscount Doneraile and the game of croquet had recovered from the ravages of the First World War and the Club had become an established venue for the premier events in the croquet world.



Lord Doneraile

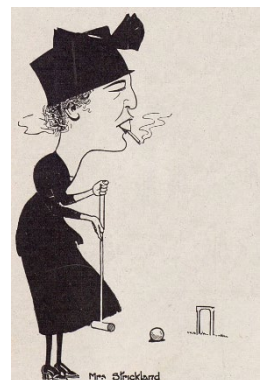
The British Newspaper Archives provide a rich source of information for these events making reference to the 'ten perfect lawns at Roehampton'. One of the major events of the croquet season held at Roehampton Club in 1923 was the Peel Memorials competition. The attached photograph appeared in the Sphere Magazine shows a group of the participating players.



The event derived its name from the late WH Peel, and according to the magazine, he embodied the game 'whose zeal and energy resuscitated the dying flame of a game but barely alight except on rectory lawns'. The term 'Peeling' at this time was well understood on a croquet lawn though the word in that sense would not have been found in a dictionary.

The magazine goes on to consider the future use of this popular term and whether the next generation of croquet players would be mystified and perplexed at the expression. 'Peeling' is described in the magazine as the 'highest form of scientific croquet, and to place two balls on exact spots requires the same accuracy of touch that John Roberts possessed on a billiard table. The games are analogous, for both are played with stationary balls on a level surface; but the ball is put through a hoop instead of into a pocket'.

The event at Roehampton Club attracted around a hundred and sixty players although mention is made that many of the notable performers were absent and apart from a few instances, the quality of play did not do justice to the quality of the lawns. Mrs CWC Strickland caricatured at the time had won the Ladies event in 1920 with two and a half bisques established a record by repeating her success from the scratch mark with her enterprising and accurate play.



Mrs CWC Strickland

The men's competition was reported as favouring the long bisquers, with Sir F Dutton (two and a half bisques) and J Liddell (seven and a half bisques) contesting the final. To concede five bisques was seen as a big handicap to give any player who had been on the lawns for a week, but steady play and persistent concentration met with its due reward, and the name of Sir F Dutton was to be inscribed on the cup and on the panel in the croquet pavilion.



The Winner of the All-England Croquet Handicap
Mr. J. P. Hubbard (Sleaford), who beat Mr. P. Newton (Tonbridge) at Roehampton. The heat of three games was played, and Hubbard won by two points in each game.

In a final postscript to the reporting of the event, the magazine makes reference to an official trial of new croquet hoops invented by Sir F Colchester Wemyss and named after him. The new design was met with general approval by the players but failed to provide any advantage to the inventor who was also taking part in the competition.

Other major croquet competitions held at Roehampton Club in 1923 included the All England Croquet Championships, the Gold Cup, the Gilbey Cup, and the Challenge Cups. All of these events were faithfully recorded in the sports pages of the leading newspapers and magazines. JP Hubbard from Sleaford (photo) was the men's winner of the All England Croquet Championships.

The Gilbey Cup had been donated by the Gilbey family who were active members of the Club. Their company had become the largest wine and spirit company in the world. Its heritage is now part of the Diageo Group. This year marks the centenary of the first year in which the Gilbey Cup and Challenge Cups were merged into a single competition. This event was also pictured in the September edition of the Sphere magazine showing a selection of the participants.

Steve Riedlinger, Club Archivist

