

# From the Archives – 8th August 2024

## Croquet Celebrities at Roehampton Club

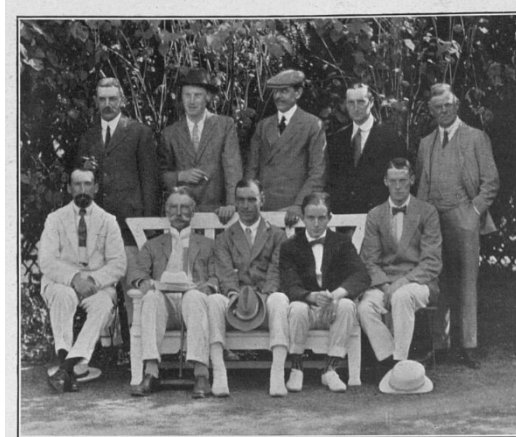


In a previous article published in the Roehampton Club Recorder in May, an incorrect name was shown alongside other croquet individuals and events at Roehampton which I would now like to amend. The name in question is Mr P Duff Mathews (photo attached taken from the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* publication in 1911).

He is also shown in the same newspaper lining up to play for the Croquet Champions Cup at Roehampton Club in the same year. An exceptional Irish croquet player who features regularly in the croquet roll of honour. The following revision based on the original article is intended to put the record straight.



Mr. P. Duff Mathews.



Back row (reading from left to right): Mr. A. Rayden Stone, Mr. P. Duff Mathews, Mr. J. E. H. Lomas, Mr. Edgar Whitaker, Mr. B. H. Burton.  
Front row (reading from left to right): Mr. R. C. J. Beaton, Mr. R. Blozsome, Mr. C. L. O'Callaghan, Mr. H. Maxwell Browne, Mr. Cyril Corbally.

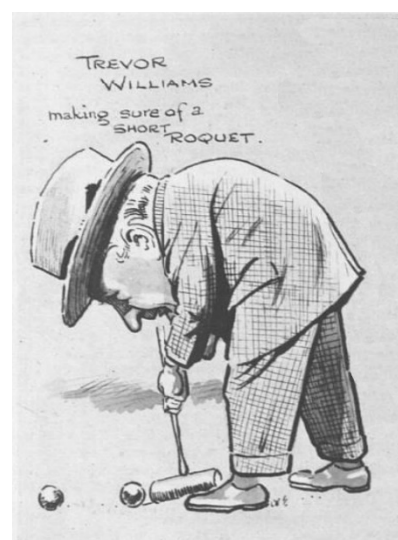
On the 1st of August 1923, The Sketch newspaper featured a full page spread of caricature figures specially drawn for the newspaper by HF Crowther Smith showing croquet celebrities at the Club.

Horace Francis Crowther-Smith was an accomplished croquet player in his own right which he successfully combined alongside his career as an author and cartoonist. He was a regular visitor to Roehampton Club on many occasions and his work is also featured in the Centenary Book by Elizabeth Hennessey in 2001 when he caricatured leading Club Members in 1926 including the golf professional, George Gadd, and Peter Miller – part of the Miller family responsible for the founding of the Club.

Crowther-Smith reached the final of the Croquet Open Championship in 1919 finishing as runner up to the winner, Duff Mathews. It was shortly

before World War I that he made his mark as a croquet writer and caricaturist with the publication of *A Croquet Alphabet*, a collection of 26 caricatures in line and watercolour. He continued his work between the wars amusing the croquet world with his use of words, pen, and his brush.

The characters featured in the *Sketch* in 1923 represent a mix of leading players, organisers of the game and Club Members. Trevor Williams had reached the singles final of the Open Championships on three previous occasions in 1897, 1899 and 1927. Unfortunately, he finished runner-up on each of these occasions although he did win the Doubles event in 1925 with Duff Mathews.





Another caricature figure in the *Sketch* is Lord Doneraile who was an influential member of Roehampton Club for many years. He was responsible for supporting the recruitment of other significant Members and was also actively involved in the running of the Club serving on the Squash committee.



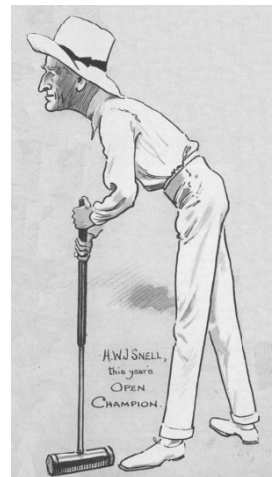
R Leetham Jones was editor of the *Croquet Gazette* from 1915- 1937 and was succeeded by HF Crowther-Smith continuing in this role until 1954.



Baron Bentley Lyonel John Tollemache (also known as Lord Tollemache and a writer on croquet and bridge) joined the Club in 1919. Croquet historian DMC Prichard mentioned in the *Roehampton Club Centenary Book*, described Lord Tollemache as 'not naturally a gifted player' ... 'succeeded by sheer hard work and a determination that every stroke he played should be tactically correct and theoretically perfect.

Prichard went on to provide the following assessment of a book written by Lord Tollemache entitled 'Croquet' which he regarded as the 'most ambitious book ever written on the game' and goes on to say 'is unrivalled being lavishly illustrated with nearly a hundred photographs of himself performing every imaginable stroke on his own lawn with

the embattled walls of Peckerton Castle. Dogmatic, assertive, intolerant and completely uninhibited, his presence electrified the atmosphere and for a full forty-five years he never relaxed his efforts to dominate and instruct. Those ready to learn from him on his terms never had reason to regret it.'



HWJ Sewell is featured as the Open Champion in 1923 and AA Capell highlighted as the Vice Chairman of the Croquet Association. The article in *The Sketch* concludes with an interesting description of the game clearly aimed at addressing misconceptions amongst those who fail to appreciate the finer points of the game and its proficiency.

The text of this account reads as follows 'Croquet is generally associated in the minds of most people with crinolines, curates, and gentle philandering at Victorian garden parties. They imagine the game to be a 'rabbity' pastime played with large, wide wire arches, and a bell in the centre of the court. This form of croquet is, however, no more croquet than rounders is cricket, and the game, as played at Roehampton Club (the headquarters of the Croquet Association), at the regular weekly tournaments throughout the season, is an affair of great skill and science really outdoor billiards. There are some 2,000 Members of the Croquet Association, of which the King is patron, and Lord Desborough, the famous allround athlete, is president.'



**Steve Riedlinger, Roehampton Club Archivist**