

Rothley Park Golf Club – Created against the odds

The Golf Club would never have existed without the foresight and ambition of Frederick Merttens.



When Merttens bought the 700 acres of the Rothley Temple Estate in 1893 he was already planning to create Rothley Garden Suburb. An essential element of this plan was the creation of a railway station in Rothley. In 1894 the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway Company had started work on the Loughborough to Leicester section of the train line connecting Manchester to London.



At exactly this time, construction of the Swithland Reservoir and the railway bridges over the reservoir had started. Lord Lanesborough was anxious that the new railway station should be situated in Swithland next to the reservoir and very close to his home in Swithland Hall and had sold 6 acres of land to the railway company for this very purpose.

Had this plan gone ahead then there would have been no housing development and therefore no golf course. In October 1894, at a packed meeting in Rothley, Frederick Merttens and John Hames (who would subsequently be a founder member of the Golf Club) agreed that they would put the much stronger commercial case for the location of the station at Rothley. They duly did so, but after several months the Company replied that since they had already purchased the land at Swithland they would not envisage moving to Rothley.

In May 1895, Merttens and Hames had given up hope, however spurred on by the Mountsorrel Granite Company and many other interested parties, Merttens offered to gift 13 acres of land off Westfield Lane to the railway company. Also Merttens offered £800 (£100,000 today) of business per year from his company in Manchester and Hames, £400 from his hosiery factory, as a further inducement. At the last moment the M.S & L. changed their minds and agreed to a station in Rothley.

Rothley Station – Under construction 1897



The Construction of the railway and the station gave a boost to the local economy, as noted in the local paper.”Railway navvies are filling every spare room in the village as lodgers. The population is steadily increasing and virtually no houses are unoccupied”

In 1900 the first houses were built on the Ridgeway and by 1912 the Rothley Garden Suburb was well under way with 13 houses on the Ridgeway and 38 houses on Swithland Lane.

Rothley Park Golf Club – Members in the early years

An analysis of the early membership shows that the majority of members lived on the south side of Leicester. No doubt availing themselves of the newly introduced electric tram links to the Grand Central Station in Leicester, where there was a regular train service to and from Rothley.

Alternatively they could take the bus.



England in 1911

- Average life expectancy was 50 for men and 52 for women
- Rothley still had a workhouse
- There were 100,000 motor cars in the country, now there are 35 million
- Most children left school at age 13
- The suffragette movement was in full flow
- Leicester had an Opera House and a Music Hall Theatre
- Of people in employment, one in seven was in domestic service
- Almost all members of the golf club in 1915 had at least 2 domestic servants
- Lord Lanesborough had 16 domestic staff
- Tea bags and instant coffee had just been introduced

Colonel Abbott Robinson – Club President 1912

Born in 1871, Major in the Leicestershire Yeomanry. Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Leicestershire for 33 years.

Born in 1872, his wife Mary Argentine Robinson was a founder member of the Ladies section.



Mrs. Robinson's mode of transport to the golf club



Major Algernon Edwin Burnaby

First Club Captain 1912 & 1913

Born in 1868, Major in the Royal Horse Guards. Master of the Quorn Hunt from 1912 to 1932.

Cousin of Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother.



Sir Maurice Levy

Born in 1859, he served as Liberal M.P. for the Loughborough Division from 1900 to 1918. During World War 1, he worked under David Lloyd George at the Ministry of Munitions. He retired from Parliament in 1918. He was appointed High Sheriff of Leicestershire in 1926



John and Harry Hames

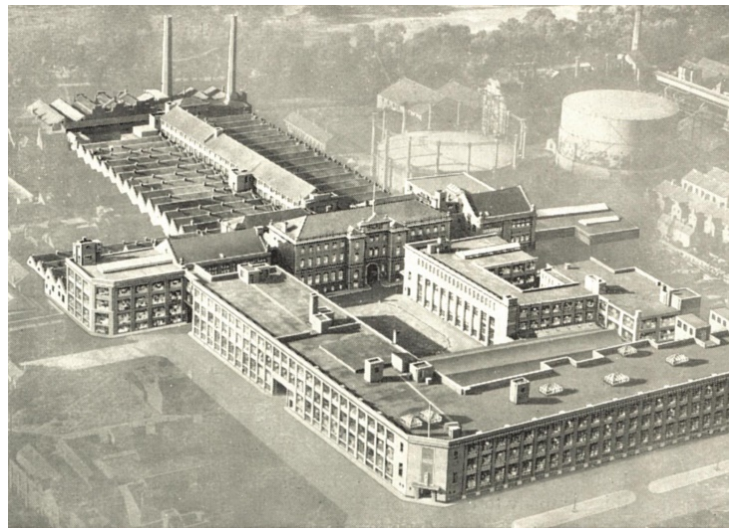
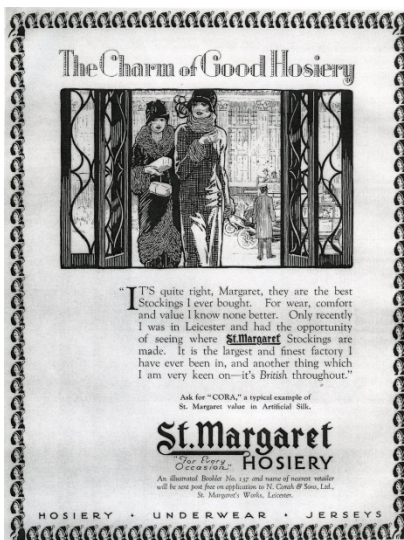
John Hames, born in 1858 and his brother Harry Hames, born in 1862 were both founder members of the club. It was John Hames who supported Frederick Merttens in their representations to have a station installed in Rothley.

The Hames brothers owned a very successful Hosiery business from their factory in Fowke Street, just opposite the Grange, in Rothley. In 1929 Harry Hames built two cottages on School Street and three cottages on Woodgate for the use of his family and subsequently for retired hosiery workers. In 1960 the Harry Hames Cottage Charity was established and to this day the cottages are rented out and the surplus income is invested in local projects.

Harry Hames was a member of the first Golf Club Council appointed on the 13th August 1911.



Captain Leslie Corah



Born into the Corah dynasty in 1888 Leslie Corah was a founder member of the golf club and played in the first inter club match in 1913.

Leslie Corah served with the 4th Leicestershire regiment in the First World War. On the 13th of October 1915 he and two other members of the club – Lieutenant Robert Harvey and Captain Reginald Faire were killed – in a day which saw the heaviest casualties in the history of the Leicestershire Regiment.



7th Earl of Lanesborough – Club President from 1913 to 1929 & Club Captain 1914

Born in 1865, Lieutenant Colonel in the Coldstream Guards. Lord Lanesborough was club President until his death in 1929.



Born in 1870, the Countess of Lanesborough (daughter of Major General Sir Henry Tombs, V.C.) was also a founder member of the Ladies section.

As mentioned earlier, work started on Swithland reservoir in 1894. In 1891 the County Council compulsorily purchased 225 acres from Lord Lanesborough's estate. The Earl strongly objected to this move on the grounds that "the privacy of the estate would be destroyed along with the sporting rights" and there started a bitter dispute as to the level of compensation due to the Earl. The dispute was eventually settled in the House of Lords and certainly not to the Earl's satisfaction.

Claude Bennion

Born in 1885. In 1911 he was a director in his father's (Charles Bennion) company, the British United Shoe Machine Company, one of the largest employers in Leicester. In 1928 Charles Bennion bought 900 acres in Bradgate Park and gave it as a gift to the people of Leicester and Leicestershire. Charles Bennion died suddenly in March 1929 and Claude Bennion took over as Chairman and Managing Director of the BU.

In 1930 Claude Bennion purchased a further 40 acres of land between Old John and Warren Hill to ensure the integrity of that side of Bradgate Park.

Claude Bennion was High Sheriff of Leicestershire in 1938 and remained Chairman of the BU until 1960. He died in 1976 at the age of 90.

James Stockdale Harrison – 1911 Committee member

Born in 1874, James was living in the Ridgeway, Rothley when he joined the golf club in 1911, he was one of the best golfers in the club playing off a handicap of 5 and played in the first inter club match in 1913.

James' father, Stockdale Harrison set up his architect's practice in 1869. The practice designed the Abbey Pumping Station in 1891. James joined the practice in 1892 and his brother Shirley joined in 1904. Literally in the month that the golf club was established, the partnership won the contract for the design of De Montfort Hall and the Usher Hall in Edinburgh. De Montfort Hall was officially opened in 1914.



Philip Russell Wykes

Born in 1888, an accountant by trade, living in Knighton. Very good golfer playing to a handicap of plus 1, he also played in the first inter club match in 1913.

- First winner of the Lord Lanesborough Challenge trophy in 1913
- President of the Leics. & Rutland Professional Golfers Association from 1911 to 1920
- Captain, Hon.Sec. and Treasurer of the Leics. & Rutland Golf Union from 1910 to 1919
- Won the County Championship in 1920
- County President from 1928 to 1930
- County Captain again in 1931
- Donated the Philip R. Wykes Bowl to the County in 1931.

Harold William Warden Prentice

Born in 1886, a founder member of the golf club, living in Imperial Avenue, Leicester in 1911.

As far as we know Harold Prentice is the only founder member who has a direct descendent who is a member today, namely his grandson, Humphrey Barrett.

Harold Prentice played rugby for Leicester Tigers and was President of Westleigh Rugby Club for many years. His younger brother Doug Prentice, played 239 games for the Leicester Tigers between 1923 and 1931 and was Captain of the 1930 British Lions tour to New Zealand and Australia, and was an England selector for many years.

James A. Hartopp

Born in 1869, Hartopp was a wine merchant and lived in Quorn.



From newspaper reports he was a talented singer and violinist. He was obviously a versatile entertainer, the Melton Mowbray Mercury reported on a "Smoking Concert" in 1909 where Mr. Hartopp royally entertained the audience with "an imitation of Highland bagpipes".

It would seem that Mr. Hartopp was not one to court popularity, he donated trophies to both the Ladies and Men's sections of the club whose format was the ever popular "against bogey" format.

Rothley Park Ladies Section

From the inception in 1911, the club had a large Ladies section. In fact as soon as the 18 holes were completed in 1913 there were regular Ladies and Gents monthly medals. One of the first competitions was a medal, open to both sections.

In 1915 there were 59 Lady members.

It may be noted that the list of early members mentioned above is dominated by men. Most of the information has been gleaned from newspaper articles, the 1915 address list of members and the 1911 Census.

Without exception, in the 1915 address book, the lady members are addressed in their husbands' initials and in the census they are either listed as having no occupation or of independent means.

However it is clear from a multitude of newspaper articles that most of these ladies were heavily involved in charity work mainly raising money for servicemen and their families.