

The Meeting at The Eyre Arms

It is a little more than 120 years since 17 gentlemen met to form Hampstead Hockey Club. We have initials for a few but in some cases only a surname, displaying some of the difficulties frequently encountered by takers of minutes of meetings.

This meeting was convened at the Eyre Arms, now sadly demolished. Come out of St John's Wood underground station and look to the opposite side of the Finchley Road and there is the site of the Eyre Arms Hotel and Assembly Rooms. It was also known as a tavern and described in 1894 as being in Hampstead but, it has to be said, is at its southernmost extreme.

This was a grand building, capable of accommodating 1,500. It included a concert room and was in extensive grounds. It was named after the Eyre family, whose substantial landed estate bordered those of Lord Portman and the Duke of Portland. Colonel Eyre was influential in the development of Hampstead by first building a turnpike that connected St John's Wood to Finchley in 1827.

Why did this meeting come about? Hockey had been played by a hockey section of Hampstead Cricket Club for several years. There is a report in the *Richmond and Twickenham Times* of 19 December 1874 of a return game between Richmond and Hampstead that Hampstead won 4-0 (but it, would appear, against eight men only).

We can assume that a number of fixtures were being obtained for the winter months, to play on each side of the cricket square after the end of the season. At the time in question, Hampstead Cricket Club's ground was at Lymington Road, Hampstead, located between the Finchley Road and West End Lane, where it still plays today.

In 1893 there was an altercation within the Cricket Club, when it was discovered that some non-members had been playing hockey at the cricket ground. The Cricket Club's historian says that these fixtures started in 1890 (although from the above we now think it was at least 15 years earlier) and that a sub-committee had been formed to deal with hockey matters.

It was pointed out that a general meeting of the Cricket Club had approved two hockey matches to be played every week. However, there was insufficient hockey-playing support from within the club to fulfill the fixtures, so outsiders had been invited to play.

There was an added problem. Although results had been very successful, a number of games had to be cancelled as the ground was frequently waterlogged. The hockey section representative complained that it was "useless to arrange fixtures for the coming season owing to the wet state of the ground".

The Eyre Arms meeting appears to have been called after the Committee of the hockey section had formed the same view and concluded that the hockey players

needed to find a new ground. Opinions were sought of those attending. John Besch, who chaired the meeting, mentioned that he and H R Lipscombe had, at Mr McMillin's suggestion, been to see a ground at Acton thought suitable for hockey that could be rented for £10 for the season.

Mr Lawrence then proposed that if the Committee (presumably of the hockey section) were unable to find a more convenient ground, he was in favour of procuring the ground at Acton. He was supported by Mr J N Brown.

With a general meeting of the Hampstead Cricket Club due to take place two days later, the meeting decided formally to propose that "it is the opinion of the meeting that in consideration of the wet state of the Cricket Club ground, a hockey pitch be hired elsewhere for next season" and that "if no more convenient ground can be found than at Acton, it is decided to rent a ground there."

It added that it sought the Cricket Club's permission for the hockey section to control its own affairs, including the election of officers and members. The uniform was to be as before, "a shirt of the club colours and a dark blue cap." New members were to be proposed and seconded, as they were under the rules of the Cricket Club.

As for officers, the meeting's proposal was for a Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary and not more than eight committee members (and that four would form a quorum). Mr A Russell Parker (a long servant of the Cricket Club – and goal scorer in the 1874 return match with Richmond, mentioned earlier) was to be proposed as Vice President.

Finally, those attending agreed to meet again, inauspiciously, on Friday 13 April 1894, when the decision of the Cricket Club would be known.

We know that later the hockey section of the Cricket Club was declared no longer to exist and the Hockey Club was formed.

So, we salute the pioneers who attended that important meeting, the founders of Hampstead Hockey Club:

John Besch, C D D McMillin, J N Brown, G W Ravenor, Giles, Cyril Toller, Rutland, B Brown, Warren Hale, Lawrence, Mergerstein Petty, Bishop, Danver, S Brown, H R Lipscombe and William Danby.