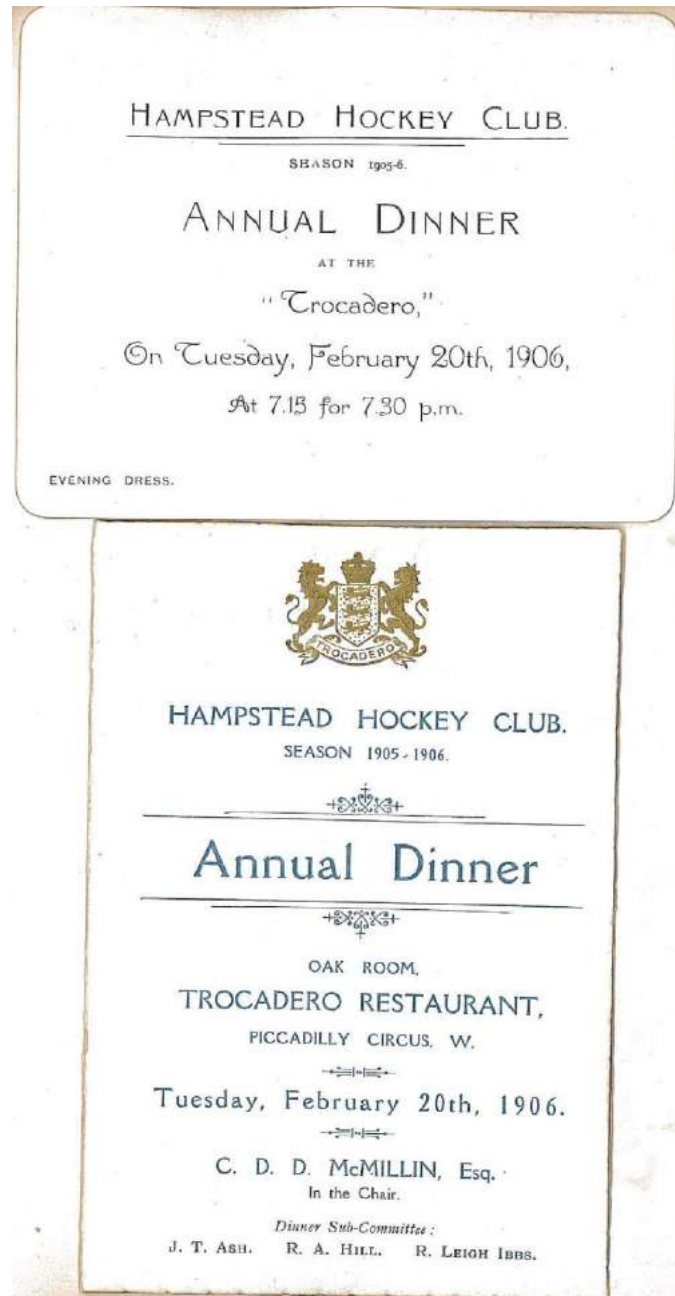


Harry Tennent

Harry Tennent was mentioned in the Club's annals in relation to the Annual Dinner that had been instituted in the early 1900's and that was generally held at the Trocadero.

The 1906 menu card is replicated in Colin Greenhalgh's *Club History*, in which Colin queried whether Harry Tennent may have helped with the arrangements for the entertainment or could he have been anticipating the role of the famous impresario?



Hockey News reported that:

The annual dinner of the Hampstead Hockey Club took place the other evening, at the "Troc.," under the presidency of Mr C.D. O. McMillin. Amongst those present were Messrs. S. H. Shoveller,

Gerald Logan, H. M. Tennent, H. R. Jordan, L.G. Campbell, R. A. Hill (captain), S. S. Pawling, E. B. Marsden, H. R. Hebert, E. E. Barnett, J. T. Ash, F. C. Wheeler, R. Leigh Ibbs (hon. secretary).

After the usual loyal toasts, the Chairman gave the toast of the Hampstead Hockey Club, tracing the history of the Club from its commencement in 1890, when it was an off-shoot of the Cricket Club. He referred to the great services rendered to the Club by several of its officials, particularly H. B. Hayman (who captained the Club for many years), W. G. Ravenor (one of its oldest members), and R. A. Hill (the present captain). Mr W. G. Ravenor responded. Mr E. L. Marsden gave the health of the chairman in a racy speech. Among the contributors to the after-dinner entertainment were Messrs. Whitworth Mitton, H. M. Tennent, J. T. Ash, Roberts, C. R. Trimen, E. L. Marsden, L. G. Campbell, R. Leigh Ibbs, and Arthur E. Godfrey

H M Tennent was Honorary Secretary of the Hockey Association at the time and one of his appearances for Hampstead was on its southern tour in April 1907. This included a game against Folkestone and may well have formed part of the very first Folkestone Festival.

Tennent was one of the Umpires in the 1908 Oxford and Cambridge Hockey Match and one of the main chroniclers of the early Varsity Matches, which had started in 1890.

Born on 18 February 1879, Harry Moncrieff Tennent was at school at Blackheath Collegiate College. At a time when organised sport was expanding at schools and universities, he came on to the scene as a versatile athlete. He played rugby football and was in the College cricket XI. In addition to playing fives and racquets, he is credited with starting the College hockey team. He went up to Wadham College Oxford in 1897 and was in the University hockey team for four years, being Secretary in 1899 and Captain in 1900 when a half blues for hockey were awarded at Oxford. Cambridge granted half blues in 1894.

He played cricket occasionally for Wadham College and also continued his interest in fives and racquets. On top of all this activity, he became President of the Oxford University Dramatics Society (OUDS) where his lifelong interest in the theatre took root.

Tennent went down in the summer of 1901 and at once took an active role in expanding the organisation of hockey. He began by establishing the Oxford University Occasionals Hockey Club in 1901 and became its Secretary until 1909. By 1913, the Club had 400 members and was organised on similar lines to the Oxford University Authentics (cricket) Club. Cambridge University's counterpart was the Cambridge University Wanderers Hockey Club, formed in 1904. Harry Tennent was made an honorary member.

Tennent was a regular member of Blackheath Hockey Club, becoming its captain. He was also an occasional member with Hampstead for tours and Easter Hockey Festivals.

He played for the South on many occasions and had been appointed Secretary of the Hockey Association until 1909. Even in these early days of the organisation, the Association was laying the foundation of its resolute opposition against any sort of "league", an opposition continued until 1957.

Harry Tennent was also on the Olympic Hockey Board and arranged all the hockey part of the Olympic programme in London in 1908, besides filling the post of Chairman of the new

International Hockey Board. He was Captain of the Kent County Hockey Team from 1903 to 1910. As a member of the Worplesdon Club, he found time and energy to play golf.

All this activity in the sporting field was going on as Harry Tennent was developing his business career. In his early years he was connected with the Board of Agriculture. He then moved and joined Broadwood Pianos, of which he was sub-manager in 1923, a job that suited his musical talents and interests.

But the main part of his life was the running of H.M. Tennent Limited, which he built up to be the most successful impresario business in London's West End for three decades. He became well-known as a theatrical producer, impresario and songwriter.

In March 1929, Harry Tennent and Hugh (*Binkie*) Beaumont met for lunch at Verrey's Restaurant in Regent Street. Already assistant general manager (and general manager of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane), Tennent engaged Beaumont as his assistant to help in booking shows for Moss Empires. They had first worked together in Cardiff. They set up on their own in 1936. Their first production at the Queen's Theatre in 1936 was a failure.

They formed H M Tennent, with offices on the top floor of the Globe Theatre (previously the Hicks Theatre, now the Gielgud) in Shaftesbury Avenue, where they enjoyed great success. Their organisation set exacting standards for their theatre presentations for 30 years.

Kitty Black joined as a secretary in 1937 and remembers Tennent as a tall grey haired figure with horned rimmed glasses. He held himself extremely erect and strode around the small office like an ex-guardsman.

He was the Managing Director of the Drury Lane Theatre and had been responsible for launching Ivor Novello on his incredible string of successes there, *Glamorous Nights*, *Careless Rapture*, *Crest of the Wave* and *Dancing Years*.

Their best loved and remembered production was *The Importance of Being Earnest* with Edith Evans as a triumphant Lady Bracknell and a stellar cast of John Gielgud, Jack Hawkins, Margaret Rutherford, Peggy Ashcroft and Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies. It opened on 14 August 1939 to rave reviews. It was, however, brought to a premature end when war broke out in September 1939 and the Government closed all theatres down temporarily.

The organisation was to suffer an unexpected blow. At midday on 10 June 1941, Harry collapsed on the steps of the United Universities Club in Whitcomb Street, where he went to lunch each day and was rushed to hospital. He was diagnosed with an aneurism and by 8.00pm he was dead at the age of 62.

Nothing had prepared the staff for the shock of losing their Managing Director. By many accounts, he was the soul of courtesy, kindness personified. His relationship with his staff coloured the entire firm's operations. He trusted everyone and relied completely on their good sense and co-operation.

Binkie Beaumont took charge of the business at the age of 32 until he died in March 1973. Having been associated with, amongst others, the classic productions of *My Fair Lady* in 1958 at Drury Lane and *West Side Story* at Her Majesty's.

In the House of Commons debate over the Theatrical Companies Bill 1954, accusations were made by the Labour MP, Woodrow Wyatt, that Binkie Beaumont and the Tennent group of companies were legally using an exemption from an Entertainments Duty, then levied by HM Customs & Excise, to their advantage by essentially running a non-profit business alongside a far larger profit-making business that had created a theatrical monopoly with which their competitors could not compete. The Bill was introduced as a measure to control non-profit making theatrical companies but was refused a second reading on 2 April 1954.

There was opposition to the Bill, pointing out that Woodrow Wyatt's was "a strange attitude" to be taken by an MP interested in the theatre and who wished to help it. "Just because Tennents is a successful organisation" it was being looked upon with great suspicion, instead of being congratulating it on its success.

In effect, the basis of the sponsor's argument seemed to be that "if you see something really efficient you should try to destroy it. Tennents is doing nothing wrong. It has no monopoly. Its ideas are open to anyone to adopt if they wish to do so....the only crime committed by Tennents is that it employs Mr. Beaumont who has... a great flair for theatrical productions and a great ability and experience in this field of enterprise But apparently the law must be altered in order to try to make this success into a failure."

Another MP suggested instead of doing something to support the theatre, Woodrow Wyatt had "made a rather bitter attack on it from the point of view of publicity for the theatre. The attack was quite unnecessary. He talked about five of our leading actors being employed by Tennent Productions and implied that it was more or less impossible for other theatres to get anybody who is any good".

It was later said that, "It just happens that the Tennent company and Mr. Beaumont and his supporters on the board have been extremely effective, intelligent and enterprising. There is an appalling amount of jealousy about that sort of thing, and that jealousy is being interpreted in the House today.."

H M Tennent Limited was known especially for its later production of *My Fair Lady* between 1961 and 1963 and of *What the Butler Saw* (by Joe Orton) in conjunction with Lewenstein – Delfont Productions Ltd in 1969 at Queen's Theatre, London and *Private Lives* (by Sir Noël Coward) at Theatre Royal Drury Lane, at Queen's Theatre, London and at the Globe Theatre, London.