

Annual Dinners: the beginnings

Annual Dinners featured significantly in the calendar of Hampstead Cricket Club and it is assumed that once it had become established, the same concept was adopted by Hampstead Hockey Club.

They seemed to be organised on the same lines, with a Chairman and Dinner Committee. There would be a good number of distinguished guests, many amusing after dinner speeches, raconteurs and singers, frequently members of the club. The Dinner invitation Cards, menus and toasts appeared to be adopted equally by the Hockey Club, as were the number of food courses.

The first indication of a wish by the Hockey club to celebrate with an annual dinner appears at the Annual General Meeting held on 10 September 1904 at the Constructional Club in Hampstead, when a Dinner Committee was formed. H R Hebert, F C Wheeler R Leigh Ibbs and J T Ash were appointed.

Frank Wheeler had participated, along with Robert Leigh-Ibbs, in the Annual Dinner for the Cricket Club on 7 March 1901 at the Empire Hall of the Trocadero at Piccadilly Circus. According to the Cricket Club's historian Freddie Monro, this was "one of the most successful functions ever held under the auspices of the Club".

After the loyal toast, the Club Chairman proposed the health of the Cricket Club and this was responded to by Mr Wheeler, described by Monro as "one of the most perfect after dinner speaker I have ever heard".

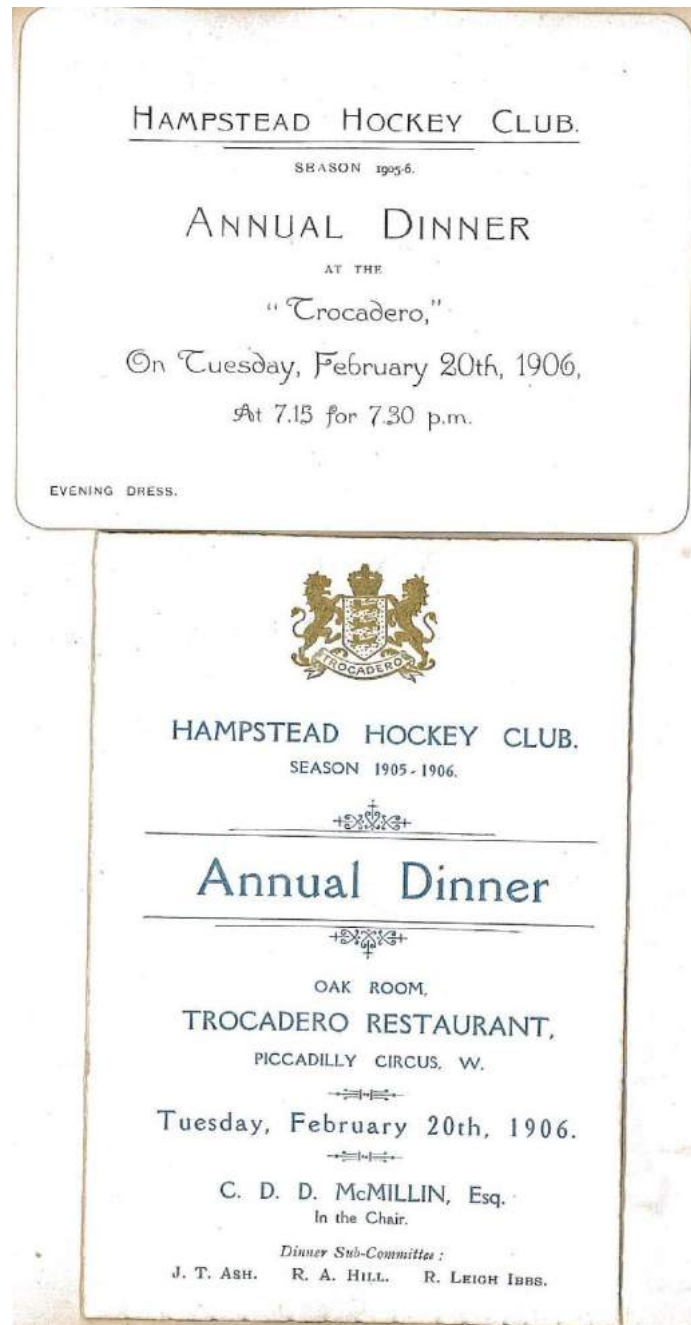
Frank Wheeler, then the Hockey Club Secretary, gave formal notice of the Hockey Club Dinner, which he had agreed to chair, to be convened on 2 March 1905 also at the Trocadero, at 7.15pm for 7.30pm, with tickets costing 7/- each, "The Committee hopes that all Members will make the point of attending". No other details of that Annual Dinner have been discovered.

But it was repeated in the next season, convened at the Oak Room of the same venue on 20 February 1906 and organised by a committee of R A Hill, J T Ash and R Leigh Ibbs. C D D McMillin was in the chair. A dinner card has been kept.

The Dinner was later reported in *Hockey News*.

The annual dinner of the Hampstead Hockey Club took place the other evening, at the "Troc.," under the presidency of Mr C.D.D. 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.



Robert Leigh Ibbs (or *Slibbs*, as he was known) was elected as a member of Hampstead Hockey Club on 23 November 1895. He played first team cricket for Hampstead Cricket Club and was well known as a chronicler of the times for the club. He was described as a most vigorous and red-faced of men. He was equally busy at the Hockey Club, taking over as Secretary in the 1905-6 season and fulfilling that role for two years.

Slibbs was relied upon to ensure the quality of the entertainers and always persuaded Robert Kennerly Rumford and Henry Squire to attend the Cricket Club Annual Dinners. In particular, at the 1901 Annual Dinner. Kennerly Rumford "most generously" gave his services and was "warmly received for his splendid rendition of *When the Swallows Homewards Fly* and *The Old Grey Fox*." Harry Lauder also appeared at this Dinner and "evoked roars of laughter with his three humorous songs".

Robert Kennerly Rumford was a baritone, well known for his performance of the Oratorio. Following his marriage to the well-known contralto, Clara Bell, he toured with her all over the English-speaking world, with a repertoire of more popular songs. He was born in Hampstead in 1870 and educated in London, Frankfurt and Paris. He married Clara when aged 22. She died in 1936 and he remarried five years later. His reputation was made with more serious works such as Bach's *St Matthews' Passion* and Brahms' *Ernesto Gesange*.

However with Clara he performed Grand Concerts at the Royal Albert Hall and toured the world. He also served in World War One between 1914 and 1917 and later with the Special Intelligence Department of the War Office. Between 1909 and 1920, he made a number of recordings for HMV and from 1915 for Columbia Records, He died aged 86 in March 1957.

William Henry Squire was born in 1871 and was a cellist, composer and music professor. He studied the cello at the Royal College and Guildhall Schools of Music. He was principal cellist in several major London orchestras and helped make the cello popular as a solo instrument. He was especially well known for his performances of Elgar's and Saint Saens' cello concertos. His legacy may well be his collection of student-level works for the cello and piano that are included in string teaching syllabuses, including those of the Associated Board of the Royal School of Church Music.

At the turn the century, he made frequent concert tours of the provinces of England as a soloist with Clara Butt and Robert Kennerly Rumford – hence his appearances at the Hampstead Cricket Club Annual Dinners.

In 1906, Robert Leigh-Ibbs formed a concert agency with John Tillett. The agency became for the greater part of the 20th century as well known and regarded as the equal of Marks & Spencer's influence on the High Street. It represented an unmatched number of international stars, such as Clara Butt, Fritz Kriesler, Pablo Casals, Sergei Rachmaninov, Andreas Segovia, Kathleen Ferrier, Myra Hess, Jacqueline du Pre, Julian Lloyd Webber, Clifford Curzon and Vladimir Ashkenazy.

The legacy of Ibbs & Tillett is said to have remained a benchmark for the current competitive world of artist management and concert promotion, many of whose principal operators began their working lives as *lbblets*.

After their deaths, the agency was run by John Tillett's wife, Emmie, who was dubbed the *Duchess of Wigmore Street* and became one of the most formidable and yet respected women in British music.