

## PRE TVSC - The Walton Skiff Club 1903 – 1907

With information supplied by Tim Tomlinson SRA President 2020

In September 1902 it was decided to create a Walton Skiff Club, which would offer a challenge to the Skiff club. Vincent Furnivall a Skiff Champion was its instigator. The club was offered excellent facilities at Rosewell's boathouse where the marina now stands. Club members were able to use the hire skiffs at a preferential rate.

A special general meeting and club supper was held at the beginning of March 1903, green and gold were chosen as the club's colours, the President appointed was Mr R V Somers Smith, JP, a rowing enthusiast whose son rowed in the 1905 boat race, and an assembly of distinguished vice presidents were elected including Mr A W Aston of the stock exchange who presented a club champions cup and Dr, H Macnaughton Jones an eminent ear specialist. The club affiliated to the Skiff Racing Association in 1903.

Two skiff champions P J Tarrant and C E Liles formed the back bone of the club, during the first year the membership increased to over 60. Many of the novices, who were probably young visitors who flocked to the riverside chalets in the summer apparently developed their skills so quickly that they soon challenged the more experienced skiff racers.

The club boasted the best reach for rowing after Henley and established a regatta with an upstream course for 670 yards (612 metres) from a lawn, possibly where Riverhouse and gardens now stands, to the boat house for all rowing races except the club championship, which was half-a-mile from Tumbling Bay. The punting course was from the Anglers. On the Middlesex bank there was space for hundreds of spectators to watch the races from start to finish.

In the 1904 season the membership was over 80 and the green cap of Walton was seen over 50 times crossing the finish line first at many regattas.

The 1905 season continued well, the club was financially buoyant, Rosewell was preparing three skiffs based on the Skiff Club model should the club be able to buy them, and ecstatic speeches foresaw the increasing growth and success of the club. The Interclub competition was introduced in 1905 and Walton provided a good competition to Skiff Club.

Then in 1906 the Walton club became inactive, and in 1907 it was referred to in passing as "defunct". What sudden meteorite brought it to extinction?

Some of the active members of Walton returned to the Kingston Skiff Club taking the Aston Cup with them. Others may have turned their attention up stream.

For five years a regatta had been organised annually on an ad hoc basis on the Laleham Reach by Reg Ormiston, who had a summer bungalow there. The regatta had become a success, and probably helped towards the demise of Chertsey regatta in 1903.

In 1906 Ormiston decided to create a club which would oversee the regatta on a permanent basis. It seems it was carefully called the "Laleham Boating and Punting Club". Some of the ex-Walton members joined this club which ran successfully for many years, its most notable member and Skiff Champion being Penny Chuter.

## Excerpt from The Surrey Comet Jan 28 1903

*At a meeting of the Skiff rowing association last week, the newly formed Walton Skiff Club was affiliated. The annual general meeting of the Skiff RA will be held on Friday, Feb 13, at Anderton's Hotel, and after this the Skiff Regatta secretaries will meet to arrange dates for the regattas for 1903.*

## Except from Surrey Comet March 11 1903

*At a special general meeting of the newly formed Walton Skiff Club held last Wednesday at the Ashley Park Hotel it was stated that the membership had nearly reached 50. Mr R V Somers-Smith has consented to become president. Financially, when all subscriptions were to hand and after all expenses had been paid there would be close to £20 in hand. The headquarters of the club are conveniently situated at Rosewell's upper boathouse, commanding a good view of the regatta course. They comprise comfortable club and dressing rooms and everything possible will be done to make the club a centre of attraction for river people. Members will have the advantage of special terms in hiring boats and the annual subscription is 10s 6d for men and 7s and 6d for ladies. The dates fixed for the various races are April 18, May 2, 16 and 23, June 4, 13 and 30, July 14 and 21, August 6 and 22. On the last named date it is intended to hold a regatta, which will be made as attractive as possible. The officials of the club are as follows:- President Mr R V Somers-Smith, J. P CC: vice presidents Messers. A W Aston, A H Bonnard, E E Cook, H Macnaughton-Jones M D, G D Jennings, T S Meacock and H M Wood; committee Walton, Messers F J Vincent Furnivall, LRC, W E Linco'n, E Priest, James Scott and H G Smith: Weybridge Messers Selby Howard and J H R Kelly; honorary treasurer Mr Owen Carpenter, The Anchorage Walton-on-Thames; Honorary secretary Mr Alex Norman 41 Mark Lane EC.*



*Rosewells Boathouse early 1900's (postcard)*

## Robert Vernon Somers-Smith – first president of Walton Skiff Club

Robert Vernon Somers-Smith was born 23 May 1848 in Little Bentley, Essex, England, the son of Rev. Henry Richard Somers-Smith. He married 29 July 1875 in Paddington, Greater London, England, Mary Gertrude Wellington Radcliffe, daughter of John Alexander and Fanny Johnson (Younge) Radcliffe. Robert died 31 March 1934.

Robert attended Eton and Merton College at Oxford and received his B. A. in 1871. He was a clerk to Grocer's Company.

From St Mary's Church Oatlands memorial tablet – reference to first president – Robert Vernon Somers-Smith.

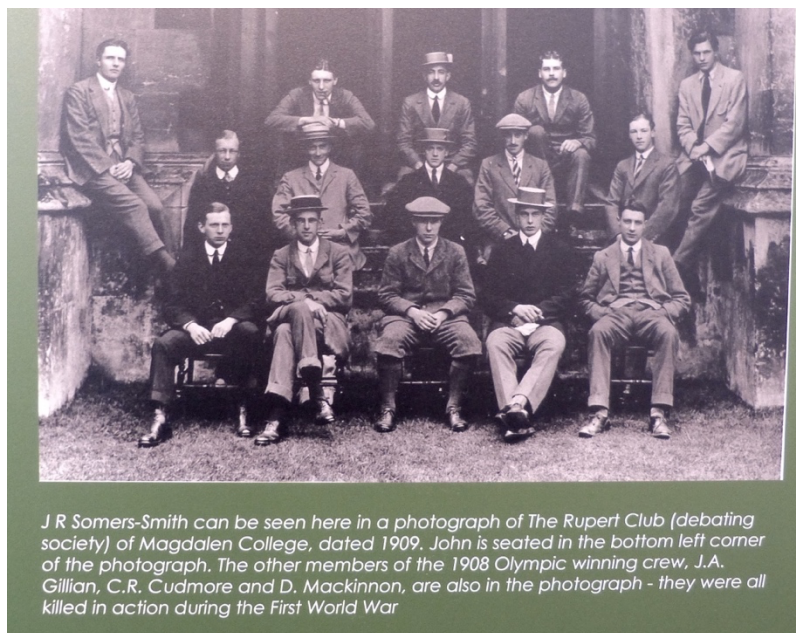
JUNE 1915 On our memorial tablet for this month is - Second Lieutenant Richard Willingdon SOMERS-SMITH, aged 31 of the 7th Battalion The King's Royal Rifle Corps who was killed on 30 June 1915 and is buried at Bedford House Cemetery (Enclosure 2. VI. A. 27.) From "Burlea", Westcar Lane, Hershams, the son of R V Somers-Smith and brother of John Somers-Smith who was killed on 1 July 1916. Richard was educated at Eton and Merton College, Oxford. In 1904 and 1905 he rowed for his university against Cambridge.



Richard Somers-Smith

He died while trying to save his sergeant. News was brought that a bursting shell had buried some of his men. He ran to dig them out and was struck by a piece of shrapnel and killed instantly. He is shown as SOMMERS-SMITH on the village Memorial and is also commemorated on the Hershams Memorial.

From Wikipedia – John Somers-Smith rowed in coxless 4 at the 1908 Olympics. Full crew: Collier Cudmore, James Angus Gillan, Duncan Mackinnon and John Somers-Smith



TVSC founding member was fellow 1908 Olympian Harry Blackstaffe.

## John Robert Somers-Smith

### From Wikipedia:

**John Robert Somers-Smith** MC (15 December 1887 – 1 July 1916) was an English rower who competed in the 1908 Summer Olympics. He was killed in action during the First World War.

Somers-Smith was born at Walton-on-Thames, Surrey, the son of Robert Vernon Somers-Smith and his wife Gertrude. His father ran for Oxford against Cambridge in 1868 and 1869 and was twice the AAA half-mile champion. Somers-Smith was educated at Eton College, where he was 'Captain of the Boats', and Magdalen College, Oxford University, where he rowed for his college. Although he did not row for Oxford, his brother, Richard Willingdon Somers-Smith took part in the Boat Race in 1904 and 1905.

Sport, Rowing, University Boat Race, 1905, Oxford University, winners of the 1905 race, Back row, L-R: H,Farrer, L,Jones, H,Bucknall, Middle row, L-R: A,Hales, E,Evans, A,Graham, A,Balfour, Richard Somers-Smith, Front, L,Stedall,(Cox) (Photo by Bob Thomas/Popperfoto via Getty Images/Getty Images)



The Magdalen College Coxless four that John rowed with won the Wyfold Challenge Cup and the Visitors' Challenge Cup in 1907, with another double win in the Stewards' and the Visitors' at the Henley Royal Regatta in 1908,<sup>[4]</sup> and was selected to represent Great Britain in rowing at the 1908 Summer Olympics, Somers-Smith was stroke of the four along with [Collier Cudmore](#), [James Angus Gillan](#) and [Duncan Mackinnon](#). This crew won the gold medal for Great Britain, defeating another GB Leander crew, and crews from Canada and the Netherlands.

Somers-Smith had been elected a member of Leander Club in 1906, after winning the Ladies' Challenge Plate with Eton College, but at no time did he ever represent Leander on the water. He subsequently became a lawyer by profession.

Somers-Smith served with the 5th London Regiment (London Rifle Brigade), part of the Territorial Force of the British Army during the First World War, and was awarded the Military Cross for gallantry in action as a captain in 1915 at the 2nd Battle of Ypres. He fell in action at the opening of the Battle of the Somme offensive on 1 July 1916 aged 28, during the assault by the 56th (London) Division at Gommecourt. His body was not recovered from the field and his name is engraved on the gateway for the missing of the Somme at Thiepval.

## Henry Macnaughton Jones - Vice president of the Walton Skiff Club 1903

The Irish otologist, gynaecologist and ophthalmologist Henry Macnaughton Jones was the son of Thomas Jones, a doctor from Cork. He spent most of his early career locally, founding the Cork Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital, which was later known as the Victoria Hospital. Moving

to London in 1883, he concentrated on obstetrics and gynaecology. He married when he was only twenty-two, and in the 1911 census we can see that there were three surviving children. His obituary tells us that "His *Handbook on Diseases of the Ear and Naso-pharynx* passed through six editions".

Henry was married to Henrietta, the third daughter of William Veiling Gregg, solicitor of Marlborough House, Cork, and they had five children.

During the summer of 1917 Henry contracted a chill at the seaside, and he never fully recovered from the serious effects.

His death took place at his residence on Friday 26 April 1918 at The Rest, Ravenscroft Park, High Barnet, London.



### The Surrey Comment Sat Aug 27<sup>th</sup> 1904 – Walton Skiff Club regatta

A pleasant day up-river

*Transcript:*

*The members of this club brought their season to a close this Saturday in brilliant fashion, when they held their annual regatta. Although the club has only been established two seasons, it has increased rapidly both in members and popularity, and bids fair to become one of the largest institutions of its kind on the river. It has certainly many things in its favour. It is well officered, with Mr R V Somers-Smith C.C. as the president, and a number of vice presidents, excellent quarters at Mr S Rosewell's boathouse, and a beautiful reach on which to practice rowing. The members, who now number over 100, can certainly look back upon the past season with a great deal of pleasure, as their colours have carried fore in almost every upriver regatta where there were races for them to enter. At Maidenhead they carried off the Ladies' Doubles, senior-Junior doubles and Dongolas; at Borne End the Ladies doubles, senior sculls, senior-junior doubles and mixed doubles; at Kingston the Evelyn challenge cup for junior sculls and senior double sculls; at Windsor and Eton the mixed doubles and senior doubles; at Hampton Court and Dittons the junior doubles, senior-junior doubles and canoe punting, whilst some members have won prizes in scratch fours and dongolas. This is a record of which the club may well feel proud. Eleven club events have been decided during the season, and as an encouragement for members to enter for these prizes were given by the captain, Major C E Liles for the lady and gentleman making the biggest aggregate number of entries. That for the former was won by Miss Saunders and for the latter by Herbert W Watts and there were presented on Saturday. Fortunately the weather was all that could be desired and a most pleasant afternoon was spent by a large number of spectators both ashore and afloat. The clashing of fixtures with that at Wargrave kept away many known skiff pullers, but still there was a very fair entry, providing sufficient sport to fill up six hours. There was a very nice collection of prizes offered for competitions among special donors being Mr H Macnaughton-Jones M D and Mr B Tindall. The articles were on view at the club headquarters and attracted considerable attentions. The regatta was held under the rules of the ARA, SRA and TPC and the course was 670 yards up-stream for all rowing races except the club championships which was half a mile finishing just below the club headquarters. This was kept clear by Mr Pimm of the Thames Conservancy. Much of the racing was very exciting, and three finer contests than those for the club championship double sculls could not be wished for, the Aston Challenge cup being won by G E Andrews and C E Liles by six inches only from F J Frecker and P J Tarrent, while a number of other races were won by considerably less than a boat's length. Mr A J Hampton officiated as starter and umpire from the steam launch Golder Hope, and Mr H Ellington L.R.C was distance judge. Mr W E Lincoln carried out the duties of honorary secretary most courteously, while Mr Ernest Priest as honorary house steward, assisted by a number of ladies, dispensed tea and other refreshments to everyone. The following committee*

also worked hard in various ways in bringing the regatta to such a successful issue: Messers H A Knight (honorary treasurer), G B Carvill. R H Haxell. A J Hampton, Selby Howard, L W Jenkins, Herbert Malin, Ernest Priest, James Scott, B Tindall, Herbert Watts, C.S. Wills and J.K. Whittingham.

*Local Waterman's single sculls- second heat*

*Station 1 – F Rosewell (Surrey)*

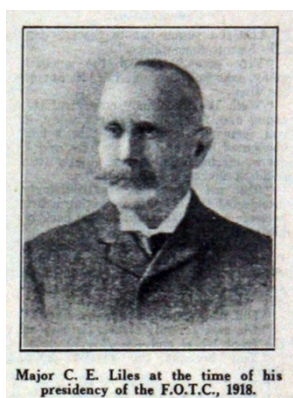
*Station 2 – E Rosewell*

*The brothers put up a very fine race, F Roswell winning by two feet only.*

Other race results have been omitted

*When the last race was paddled it had grown quite dark, the umpires launch having the lights up. A rush was made for the club room to see the prizes distributed by Mrs H Macnaughton-Jones, to whom a bouquet was presented by Miss Selby Howard. Mr Lincoln, the honorary secretary, prior to the distribution, made a few remarks in the course of which he mentioned that that was the second year of the club existence and he thought they had made good progress. Last year he termed a baby regatta, but he thought that this year they had plainly proved to the whole of the river that the Walton Skiff Club had come to stay. (Applause). He then introduced Mrs Macnaughton-Jones, and that lady handed the prizes to the winners, who came in for hearty cheers. At the close Mr Priest, in a few well chosen words proposed a vote of thanks to Mrs Jones for so kindly coming to present the prizes and this was carried with three cheers. In acknowledging it Mr Macnaughton-Jones thanked the company sincerely for the handsome reception they had given to his wife, who he said had had to put up with him for many years as a rowing partner for a great many years. All through his life rowing had been a favourite sport of his, and even now he should not fear a trail spin from lock to lock with anyone his own age. A peculiarity of the Walton Skiff Club was that there were no first class fours or eights but only the ordinary skiff rowing, which had the advantage of developing rowing among the gentler sex. He wished that some of those who had recently been talking so much rubbish about the physical deterioration of our women had been present that day to see the finishes of their races, and they would have gone away with a different opinion, and have believed with him that there are none like English men and English women. The sooner everyone when in for this kind of sport the better it would be for all of them. He concluded by expressing the great pleasure it had given his wife to present the prizes that evening, and this concluded the proceedings of a most successful regatta.*

#### The Walton Skiff Club captain 1904 – C E Liles



Major C.E. Liles claimed 500 prizes for rowing, cycling, running, walking, boxing and yachting.

*The following was taken from*

*<https://heartheboating.com/2018/11/26/tom-everson-revisited/> -*

*Major Liles. President of Auriel Kengston RC for a number of years.*

*A keen cyclist, in the early years of the century, he was something of a pioneer in organising bicycle infantry units. (See <http://www.25thlondon.com/26thhistory.htm>) He was five foot nothing in height, had a round bullet head and a walrus moustache. In spite of his advanced years, he would come down, collect an unwary crew of shy newcomers and take them afloat. He always stroked, and crammed in as many as he could to the minute, racing up and down his slide like a steam piston with his moustache puffed out in front of him. Tradition has it that he was once stroking a leading crew in a race when a certain Frenchman in the boat suddenly threw away his oar,*

waved his arms in despair and shouted 'I CAN ROW NO MORE. I DIE. I AM OUT OF BREETH'.

'The Major', one of those people who look much the same in a caricature as in a photograph.

#### MAJOR LILES'S SPORTING RECORD.

There is no better known cyclist in London than "Charlie" Liles, none who is more admired for his general all-round fitness, and none who has retained such consistent form for the last twenty years. His cycling career starts with a handicap in April 1880, but the jewel of his athletic crown will always be his victory over the almost invincible Herbert Liddell Cortis on the 24th of the following June, in the One Mile Amateur Championship. Since that time races innumerable and many other championships, particularly three-wheel honours, have fallen to him, for, with one exception, he has won more National Cyclists' Union amateur championships than any other rider. In addition to his cycling abilities, he is a good, hard-working oar, always welcomed by the stroke of a scratch crew at Putney or Hammersmith, very smart at the noble art, but always with a weakness for the real thing with the raws, an untiring pedestrian, a smart yachtsman, being half-owner of the Tercel, and altogether just what one would like to think every Englishman. Imbued with cool, dogged pluck and persistency, allied with coolness and caution, a thorough knowledge of what cyclists can do, and a thorough acquaintance with his military duties, the services of a real good man will be thrown away if his offer is put on one side.



### Early regattas

#### Newspaper transcript 1903

#### Walton Skiff Club Regatta

*Delightful weather – in marked contrast to that which was experienced for the town regatta on the previous Thursday – favoured the first regatta held under the auspices of the Walton Skiff Club on Saturday. Unfortunately, however, in getting out their fixture card at the beginning of the season, the executive hit upon the same date as that chosen for the Shepperton and Halliford Regatta, and this meant both a smaller entry and a smaller attendance of spectators than would otherwise have been attracted by the event. Next year any clashing with other local fixtures will be avoided, and the regatta will probably be on a larger scale. Considering that this is their inaugural season, the club had good reason, even, in view of the militating circumstances referred to, to be gratified with the degree of success achieved, there being a fairly good attendance of onlookers, and some capital racing. The course was half a mile long, from Tumbling Bay to Rosewell's boat-house where the club have their headquarters, and an excellent view of the races, from start to finish, was obtainable from the lawn of Mount Felix kindly lent for the occasion by Mr Cook. It was rather late before a start was made with the programme, and the events were consequently not concluded until quite dark – and even then, a tug-of-war had to be postponed till another date. The duties of starter and umpire were combined by Messrs F J Vincent Furnivall (captain) and Whittingham, and Mr Selby Howard officiated as judge. Several of the events were open, and some valuable prizes were competed for, including a challenge cup offered by Mr A W Aston. At the conclusion of racing, the prizes were distributed by Mrs James Scott. Special praise is due for the excellence of the arrangements to Mr F H W Higginson, who recently succeeded Mr Alex Norman as hon. Secretary. The tug-of-war, together with ladies singles and gentlemen 's doubles, will probably take place on September 12<sup>th</sup>, appended are the details of events:*

*Double Sculls club championship (Aston Challenge Cup)*

Heat 1 – Surrey – C S Wills (stroke) and H A Knight, Miss Saunders (cox) – 1st  
Middlesex – G B Carvill (stroke) and Ricketts, Mrs Carvill (cox) – 2nd

Won by a length

Heat 2 - Surrey – T South (stroke) and G B Pasco, Miss Fisher (cox) – 1st  
Centre – M Priest (stroke) and F H W Higginson, Mrs Priest (cox) – 2nd  
Middlesex – H Malin (stroke) and A G Abbott, Mrs Abbot (cox) – 3rd

Won by three quarters of a length

Final – Wills and Knight beat South and Pasco by two lengths

*Single sculls championship (prize presented by Mr E P Biss)*

Surrey – T South – 1st

Centre - C S Wills – 2nd

Middlesex – H A Knight – 3rd

South won by a quarter of a length after a splendid row; similar distance between second and third.

*Open doubles*

Centre – T South (stroke) and F H W Higginson, Miss Furnivall (cox) – 1st

Surrey – G B Pasco (stroke) and J Scott, Miss Fisher (cox) – 2nd

Middlesex – A G Abbott (stroke) and Austin, Mrs Abbott (cox) – 3rd

Won by a length and a half

*Ladies Doubles (prizes presented by Mr F W Harcock)*

Middlesex – Miss Furnivall (stroke) and Mrs South, F J V Furnivall (cox) – 1st

Surrey Mrs Lincoln (stroke) and Miss Payne, W Lincoln (cox) – 2nd

Won by a length and a quarter

*Novice doubles*

Heat 1

Surrey – A A Tindall (stroke) and C E Copland, Miss Saunders (cox) – 1st

Middlesex – H Copland (stroke) and Meacock, Mrs Watts (cox) – 2nd

Won by three and a half lengths

Heat 2

Middlesex - B O Davis (stroke) and E I Hurcombe, Mrs Abbott (cox) – 1st

Surrey – H Malin (stroke) and H F Jones, Miss Payne (cox) – 2nd

Final - Tindall and Copland beat Davis and Hurcombe easily.

*Scratch dongolas*

Selby Howard's crew beat W Lincoln's crew easily

## **The County Observer and Monmouthshire advertiser - August 20<sup>th</sup> 1904 SHEPPERTON REGATTA.**

*On account of the large entries at Shepperton and Halliford Regatta on Saturday, which took place over the usual course between the Manor House, Shepperton, and Harris's Boathouse, Halliford, it was not until dusk that the programme was completed.*

*The two amateur punting events attracted a record entry, for of the thirty-four races more than half of this number were rendered necessary for punting, ten heats for the single and six for the double being punted to decide who should start for the finals. The Single Punting was won by H. Green, who defeated L. Killick, after a fine race, by a foot, while H. J. Jaffe and M. Cohn annexed the Double Punting race, E. Pettitt and C. Pimm losing to them on a foul.*



*Nine crews were made up for the Gentlemen's Double Sculls, the winning pair being H. A. Puttock and S. O. Pugh, with Miss Dally (cox.), who beat E. Priest, H. A. Knight, and Miss Saunders (cox.), by three-quarters of a length. The most fancied pair—C. E. Liles and P. J. Tarrant—were disqualified for fouling. Miss Allanson, J. R. K. Fenning, with Mrs. Sherriff (cox.), well deserved their victory in the Ladies' and Gentlemen's Double Sculls, for after a hard struggle in their heat, in which they beat C. E. Liles, Mrs. Adams, and Miss Spaeth (cox.) by half a length, they vanquished Miss O. Dally, H. A. Puttock and Miss Dally (cox.) fairly easily in the final by a length.*

*The other amateur event was the Dongola Race, for which four crews were put. The final was decided at dusk, and after a most exciting race, the Skiff Club just succeeded in defeating the Walton Skiff Club—a junior organisation—by a foot on the post.*

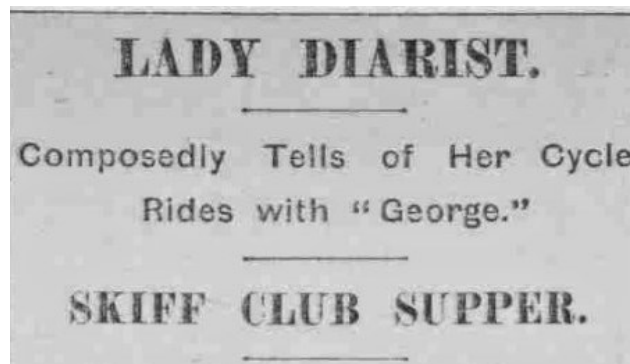
*Earlier in the day three water-men's events were decided, F. Fordham winning the Single Punting, J. G. Dunton the Watermen's Single Sculls, and F. Rosewell and E. Upsdell the Double Punting.*

## From the SRA handbook – Interclub races – Lowe Cup 1905

In 1905 F.S.Lowe presented a cup, of Indian design and workmanship, to be competed for in single skiffs by teams from clubs affiliated to the Amateur Rowing Association or the SRA, each team to consist of five men with up to three substitutes. The first event was won by The Skiff Club against the Walton Skiff Club, with F.S.Lowe himself umpiring from a double skiff.

## A bit of gossip

Information supplied by Tim Tomlinson SRA President 2020



In December 1905 the case of Norman v Norman and Mason appeared in the divorce courts, concerning Alex an insurance broker living at Wimbledon and his wife Rosa whom he accused of having an affair with George. George, in fact, was Alex's oldest friend, a rowing buddy who had been a member of Vesta and was for a time living with the couple.

The case presented a tawdry account of Alex and Rosa's domestic disputes of which it was commented "they behaved towards each other in a manner that completely violated Wimbledon canons of etiquette."

Rosa's heavily coded diary provided the main evidence for the plaintiff. In it Rosa describes cycling with George to Walton, where Alex had bought a bungalow for the summer. But it significantly covers that first meeting of the Walton Skiff Club in March 1903, when Alex was elected Club Secretary. He did not return home that night, claiming commitments in his new role, but Rosa and George went back to Wimbledon together.

Mr Justice Bargrave Deane at some point in the proceeding lent forward to enquire "What is a skiff club" On her appearance in the witness box Rosa was described as "of a very piquant and interesting individuality and very tastefully dressed." Such was the comment of the Daily Mirror, and the case was taken up by almost every regional paper in the country from the Jersey Independent to the Aberdeen Press.

Alex was granted the divorce and 500l damages. Six months later Rosa and George, having protested their innocence in the witness box, were married.

It is just a hypothesis, but in those stuffy Edwardian times of double standards, divorce was considered a disgrace and any whiff of scandal may have driven the great and the good to sever any connection with the club. By the spring, perhaps no one had the heart to restart the season.