



## **A summary of our Club History**

**prepared by John Slack, Past President, St Neots HC**

St. Neots Hockey Club originated from two directions. First, a local ladies club was founded in 1898, and secondly, the 1901 men's club came from a group of men who were keen exponents of a game called Bandy, still played commonly in Scandinavia today.

**Bandy** was played in the Fens, from the 1700's, on a pitch marked out on ice and similar to today's field hockey. The pitch has the same shape, slightly larger dimensions, 25-yard lines, same sized goals and 11 players using a 5-3-2 formation. The sticks were cut from willow trees, were 36 inches in length and weighed 20-23 ounces.

When ice was not available boys played the game in the local High Street, making a nuisance and frightening horses. The town council passed a by-law in 1870 banning hockey and instructed the local police to arrest anybody playing the game in the street. The local vicar read the 'riot act' twice in school assembly telling the boys the police were on the lookout for offenders.

### **Eaton Socon Ladies HC**

The first organised field hockey in the town was instigated on December 18th, 1898 when a group of ladies formed a team called Eaton Socon Ladies HC. They were so successful during the first 15 years they earned the nickname 'The Invincibles'. They played against Cambridge University men's college teams and organised mixed teams. In the summer they played cricket. So much for the stiff Victorian image.

### **CG Tebbutt**

In 1901, a St. Neots men's team was formed with CG Tebbutt as captain. He had been World Speed Skating Champion in 1887 and was a disciple of bandy. In the 1890's he visited Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Germany and Holland to teach them how to play bandy, and even organised the first international bandy match between England and Holland in 1891.

Tebbut's original bandy stick is to be seen in St. Neots museum. St. Neots HC possesses a programme copy of the international match. From this beginning bandy evolved into the ice hockey we know today in Europe. A separate contemporary parallel development was occurring in North America.

The first goals scored by the men's team, in their first match, were from the stick of Sidney Ekins, the grandfather of Tony Ekins who captained Great Britain's hockey team in the 1972 Munich Olympics and managed England in the 1978 World Cup in Argentina.

### **Ladies attire**

The 1902 Ladies kit rules, as written by the All-England Women's Hockey Association, under the title 'The Costume' were:

"Of attire, let it be said that boots are essential – light and with low heels, and with studded or barbed soles. Shoes neither protect the ankle from blows nor from strains. Shin guards should always be worn, and gloves, preferably light, thin, kid gloves. The skirt should be at least six inches off the ground. Gloves should always be worn, but hats never. The laws of the All-England Women's Association utterly forbid straw hats or others with hard brims, and hat pins are not to be thought of. In rainy weather a cloth cap or a Tam-O'-Shanter may be advisable."

### **Unification**

By 1911 there were three clubs in the town plus school teams. After World War One's interruption amalgamation created St. Neots and District HC. World War Two caused a further cessation although the ladies continued with keep-fit classes and cycled to local RAF bases to play their teams. This was not just because they loved hockey. They were after the ham salad teams, so scarce during rationing. They even arranged away fixtures with the local national spy-training centre.

The mixed hockey re-started in 1953 with the men following in 1968. Within a few weeks amalgamation again re-created a unified club. In 1970 the club joined up with the town's rugby and cricket clubs to form the town's Sports Association. The colts hockey was started in 1986 and the town's excellent artificial pitch opened in 1995.

A club with a surprising, but important, pedigree St. Neots HC history portrays the roller coaster record of most ordinary clubs. The research into those early years has unearthed the possible origins of our modern game, which even now continues to change and develop to make it modern, fast and exciting to watch.

**John Slack, Past President, St Neots HC**