

Castle Miscellany – Our Club. Our People, Our Stories

Welcome - Another story



Our First Lady Captains

In our previous editions of ‘**Castle Miscellany**,’ you will have read about five gentlemen of note who brilliantly steered the development of the Castle through its formative first 25 years – 1913 to 1938. Our first Captain was a gentleman from Belfast with the first name Arthur, **Arthur Dudley**, who served as the Castle Captain four times.

This year we have another Captain named Arthur, just 105 years later being **Arthur McEvoy**, a winner of the O’Meara Ciup in 1982, who has an exceptionally strong Castle pedigree as his uncle **Bernard Breen** was Captain in 1966, his dad **John** was Captain in 1976 and his mum **Maura** Lady Captain in 1986. When it stops raining hopefully **Arthur** and of course Lady Captain **Barbara McAleese** will have a wonderful year.

The Castle was founded at a time when society norms differed from the Ireland of today. The social conventions of the day extended to the Castle, with the first two lady Captains, married ladies, only being identified in records by their titles of Mrs, being **Mrs Gelston** and **Mrs Benson**. Our third lady Captain, being a single lady was identified by the title of Miss accompanied by her initial, **Miss N Wood**.

As we all know the lady members have always been the heartbeat of the club in terms of social events and club activities. Our first generation of ladies were no exception.

Let’s meet our first three Lady Captains

Discovering who our early Lady Captains required detective work. The absence of first names and husband’s initials complicated the challenge. The first two Lady Captains were identified as they lived close-by and were from prominent families. The third Lady Captain was a single lady, from a golfing family from Banagher, Co. Offaly. Confidence level that these ladies were indeed our Lady Captains – 85% plus.

Mrs Benson was English, Mrs Gelston was the daughter of a Scotsman and Miss Wood was a daughter of an Englishman.

Mrs Gelston – 1913,1914 & 1915.

Mrs Gelston, full name **Joanne Kennedy Gelston**, was born in County Dublin in 1858, to parents David and Jessie Rogerson who were from Dumfries in Scotland. Her father was a successful businessman who was a significant shareholder in the Phoenix Beer Brewery. Joanne was married to Dubliner **Epworth Arthur Gelston**, a Bank of Ireland official.

In 1901, Joanne was living in her parents’ family home in Terenure, which was a substantial house named ‘**Olney**’, on grounds of 23 acres. Also living in the house at that time were Joanne’s widowed mother Jessie; Joanne’s husband Epworth and their son John, aged 6; as well as two of

Joanne's brothers. There were five live-in house staff comprising of a Companion, a Nurse, two Parlour Maids and a Cook. The family were all members of the Church of Ireland.

The family sold the house in 1904, after the death of Joanne's mother Jessie. The Auctioneers description of the house was *'House on 23 acres. Ornamental pleasure grounds, Templeogue Road Terenure. Commanding views of the Dublin Mountains, tram service, very lofty and large dining and drawing room, 6 bedrooms, 3 WCs, servants' rooms, and usual domestic accommodation. Capital out-offices, fine garden fully cropped, gate lodge, gardener's house.'*

The house '**Olney**' has gone but the name Olney lives on in Terenure with three roads named Olney, being Olney Grove, Crescent, and Mews. By 1911, Joanne and Epworth were living on Terenure Road. Their son John was then a boarder at St. Colomba's College. The family had two live in servants - a cook and a housemaid.

While Joanne's family led a privileged life, their lives were not without personal tragedies as Joanne and Epworth lost a child and Joanne's father took his own life in 1891, aged 67. That tragedy was very traumatic for the family as the inquest into his death was public with his name and the circumstances of his death widely reported in newspapers. "Death while in a state of temporary insanity" was the verdict.

Mrs Benson - 1916

Mrs Benson was **Bessie Benson** (nee Huline), born in 1869 in England, the wife of businessman and local politician **Robert Benson**. By 1911, then parents of two, they were living in 3 Orwell Park, Dartry, along with two live-in servants - a cook and a housemaid. Bessie Benson was then a member of Rathfarnham Golf Club, regularly featuring in ladies' competitions.

Robert was born in Stockport, England in 1895, He was the Managing Director and Chairman of two Dublin laundries, the Dartry Dye Works Ltd. (est 1895) and the Dublin Laundry Company Ltd. (est 1888). In 1913 he became a member of the Rathmines U.D.C., serving on that council until 1930, when Rathmines was incorporated into Dublin City. He then became an Alderman on Dublin Corporation. Robert died in Dublin aged 84. One of Bessie's children **Ernest Edmondson Benson**, followed in his father's political footsteps serving as an Alderman on Dublin Corporation and being elected as a Fine Gael TD in 1937, representing the Dublin Townships Constituency.

Bessie, who was a competent golfer of around a 20-handicap standard, was a member of both Rathfarnham and the Castle Golf Clubs during the period 1913-1916.

Miss N Wood. 1917 & 1918

Nicola Clementine Wood was born in county Galway in 1881, one of 10 children born to Englishman Dixie Wood and his wife Florinda. Dixie was born in the Isle of Wight, and Florinda in county Galway. Nicola's father worked for an English company involved in the sheep trade. The family by 1901 were living on main street in Banagher, Co Offaly (King's County) in a substantial house located next door to a Bank of Ireland branch, named 'The Chateaux'.

Dixie was a prominent citizen in the area involved in all aspects of society including the local hunt, a game shooting club, tennis, the masonic order, and golf. He was a founder member and Hon. Sec. of Banagher Golf Club (1894-1910). Dixie Wood died in 1916. A report on the funeral recorded that only one son, then living in Northampton, attended as his other sons and a son-

in-law were on active service in the Army, one being attached to the Russian army. It was also reported that the family home was to be inherited by the eldest son. In later life Nicola returned to the family home in Banagher. She died in 1967 aged 80.

Newspaper reports confirm that Nicola was a competitive golfer and tennis player, with a golf handicap as low as 12. She was also a member of Birr Golf Club (formerly the Kings County and Ormonde Golf Club).

There is no record yet discovered which shows where Nicola lived in Dublin, so connecting her to the Castle became a best judgement call. That involved a process of elimination. There were no other viable candidates identified and in addition Nicola came from the right strata of society with a strong golfing pedigree.