

SQUARE BALLS AND LINEOUTS - BLACKHEATH RECALLS ITS ROOTS

We sometimes have some fun at HockeyTalk fuelling the rivalry over which was the world's first hockey club - Blackheath or Teddington. But we suppose that we should put the record straight.

19th Century must have been one of London's outer suburbs - were a sporty lot. Blackheath Golf Club claims to be the oldest in England, and Blackheath Rugby Club claims to be the oldest rugby club in the world. In fact the

rugby and hockey clubs have the same roots - the two split in 1864 - and you can see the rugby influence in the early Blackheath version of the game.

Played between teams of 15 a-side, and sideline balls being brought back into play via line-outs, there are more than a few similarities. And, where rugby refused to be

played with a round ball, the Blackheath version of hockey followed suit, using a 'ball' more akin to a cube.

It is believed that a society of hockey players of sorts was started at Blackheath as early as 1840, but surviving records date back to 1861. A minute book inscribed with the words, "1861 - Blackheath Football and Hockey Club" has survived from that time. A decision was taken in 1862 for the hockey and rugby clubs to split,

although the two did not separate until two years later.

In celebration of its 150 years of hockey, Blackheath Hockey Club recently organised a match on the Heath, with players in traditional costumes and played with sticks similar to those used in the early game. Their

Blackheath 150



One of the umpires shows us the 'ball'.

opponents were a Parliamentary XV, including MPs Tim Loughton and Stephen Hammond.

One early Blackheath tradition, which was partially revived, was the wearing of red and blue caps by the teams taking part. In the early days, teams were selected by the players taking a cap out of a sack. The caps were either blue or red, and you played for whichever colour you chose. One tradition that was obviously not kept was that women were allowed to play in the 2012 game. No doubt the Victorian gentlemen of Blackheath would have been shocked by the occasional sight of a lady's ankle!



The gentlemen and ladies of Blackheath Hockey Club

When Teddington celebrated their Centenary in 1971 they stated that their club had started the game of hockey 'as it is played today', and that is probably a fair claim. The modern game of hockey developed from the rules invented by Teddington. But, if you are looking for a club that played a stick and ball game called 'hockey', then Blackheath's claim to be the oldest club is beyond dispute.

In fact the gentlemen who lived on and around Blackheath - which in the mid



The Parliamentary team - or should that be coalition?



Dribbling a square ball with a walking stick was not easy, but apparently dribbling was frowned on in the early version of hockey

One thing that became immediately apparent was that the old Blackheath game called for a whole set of skills which have long been forgotten. Propelling a rubber cube with a stick similar to a walking stick would be a challenge for even the likes of Ashley Jackson or Barry Middleton. The important thing was that great fun was had by all - so some things about hockey never change[HT]