

1860s

Richard Naylor, who bought Hurlingham House and its estate in 1860, was both wealthy and a keen sportsman, winning the Derby in 1863 with his horse Macaroni. Pigeon shooting was then a popular pastime for gentlemen. In 1868 Naylor leased a part of the estate to sporting entrepreneur Frank Heathcote to stage shooting matches. Naylor's lease named Heathcote, Viscount Holmesdale and Sir Charles Mordaunt as Trustees. A pigeon-shooting club was formed the same year at 'the New Red House', Fulham (the name of a previous shooting ground in Battersea).

The first recorded Committee meeting of the new club was held at Grants the gunmakers in St. James Street on 23 February 1869, chaired by Heathcote who became the Manager and Chairman. The aristocratic connections of the Club are clear from the start, with the Prince of Wales as an Honorary Member 'who took a great interest' in the sport.

The first matches were held in early summer 1868, on three acres of land now covered by the grass tennis courts and tennis pavilion. The price of the birds varied from 20s to 24s per dozen, the best Blue Rocks obtained from Scotland. In order to ensure fair play, the guns were obliged to use shot supplied by the Club and load their guns within sight of a Club official.

The Times carried a report of a 'Grand Pigeon Shooting Match' at Hurlingham on 2 June 1868, in which the Prince of Wales took part. 'A vast number of ladies were also in the grounds', including the Princess of Wales, as from the beginning women were welcomed as guests. Betting on the matches, often of large sums of money, was a feature of the sport from its earliest days. Pigeon shooting at Hurlingham became established as part of the London Season.



Pigeon shooting match, *The Illustrated London News*,
17 July 1869



Frank Heathcote ©NPG

GRAND PIGEON SHOOTING MATCH.			
Yesterday, at the New Red-house Club, Hurlingham Park, Fulham, a pigeon shooting match was held, His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales taking part in the proceedings. The match was between the counties of Warwickshire and Norfolk, the latter-named county having the honour of the assistance of the heir-apparent. Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales, attended by the Countess of Macclesfield, accompanied her Royal husband, and took great interest in the sport. A vast number of ladies were also on the grounds, and among the gentlemen present were the Crown Prince of Denmark, Lord Dunmore, Lord Huntingfield, Lord Holmesdale, M.P., Lord Leicester, Lord Aveland, Sir F. Johnstone, Lord Parker, Lord Spencer, Lord Dudley, Captain Starkey, Colonel Bramston, Sir Thomas Moncreiffe, and, in attendance on the Prince of Wales, Lieutenant-Colonel Keppele and the Hon. A. Fitzmaurice.			
The match was as already stated between the two counties of Warwickshire and Norfolk, seven on a side, at 15 birds, 4oz of shot; those using 14oz standing at 2½ yards: the			

others at 25. The Norfolk side started, his Royal Highness killing the first bird, and the full score was as follows:—		
NORFOLK.	Total	killed.
His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales .. .. ..	.. .. ..	9
Lord Sufield .. .. ..	.. .. ..	10
Hon. T. De Grey .. .. ..	.. .. ..	5
Mr. A. Hammond .. .. ..	.. .. ..	12
Hon. E. Coke .. .. ..	.. .. ..	9
Colonel Fellowes .. .. ..	.. .. ..	10
Mr. R. Fellowes .. .. ..	.. .. ..	10
Total .. .. ..	.. .. ..	65
WARWICKSHIRE.		
Mr. Spencer Lucy .. .. ..	.. .. ..	15
Mr. Willoughby de Broke .. .. ..	.. .. ..	12
Sir C. Mordaunt, M.P. .. .. ..	.. .. ..	13
Mr. Berkeley Lucy .. .. ..	.. .. ..	10
Mr. J. West, jun. .. .. ..	.. .. ..	15
Mr. W. Chamberlayne .. .. ..	.. .. ..	3
Mr. S. Chamberlayne .. .. ..	.. .. ..	14
Total .. .. ..	.. .. ..	65
It will therefore be seen that the Warwickshire gentlemen won by 20 points. There was some very heavy betting at 3 to 1 on the gun. The arrangements by Mr. Frank Heathcote, the referee, were admirable, and an enjoyable day's sport was concluded by the usual sweepstakes shooting among the members of the New River Side Club.		

The Times,
3 June 1868