



The most famous ice rink in the world



Memories of Richmond Rink

Painting by Jody Joel



As the wonderful Victorian illustration above demonstrates, ice-skating has, for a very long time, been a popular recreational activity in our area – either on the frozen River Thames or at the much-missed Richmond Ice Rink.

We are grateful to Richmond Council and the Civic Pride Fund for helping with this small project recording memories of skaters from Richmond Rink



The piece of land in Clevedon Road, Richmond, given to the Borough by George, Duke of Cambridge (a cousin of Queen Victoria) for “leisure purposes”, has been through several transformations. First it was a roller skating rink, then in WW1 an armaments factory, after which it lay derelict until bought by Charles (or Claud) Langdon. The ice rink was opened in 1928, and very soon became the premier rink in London; it was run by The Richmond Ice Skating Rink Ltd from 1927 to 1948, then

by The Richmond Ice Rink Ltd until 1980 and finally by Sportsdrome Ltd. In 1978 the rink was sold to a property developer, Anthony Carratu, who passed it on to the London & Edinburgh Trust in 1987. The rink was closed in 1992 and demolished to make way for luxury dwellings.

Professor Jeremy Hamilton-Miller

Condensation and tobacco smoke

I can remember going to Richmond Ice Rink from our family home in Englefield Green at quite a young age – I cannot recall whether we parked or walking there, but once inside there was always a real buzz. After my mother had paid I remember the first vital thing was to get our hired boots; none of us ever had our own skates. The Boot Room was manned by a couple of old men who always seemed dour and aggressive. They would demand your shoe size, half-sizes being ignored, then we handed over our shoes before attempting the difficult task of putting on our skates and tying up all the laces. Our dad later told us he used to go skating to meet girls by offering to tie up the laces on their boots! We were too young to get involved in any of that! I remember you had to take care that another kid or adult did not stagger by on the rutted, scarred old lino and accidentally step onto your feet! Then it was time for the first, tentative steps onto the ice and invariably falling over; I would then retreat to the edge, hugging



the perimeter with my hands before attempting another go. There was a dirge of taped music that I suspect was just repeated. Now and again there would be intervals and glamorous young ladies and athletically-slim guys would have sole use of the rink to practice and show us how to do ice dancing. After all the excitement of the skating we would have a hot drink in the rink's café, which I recall was always steamy from the mixture of condensation and tobacco smoke. It felt good to get the skates off and rest ankles that were unused to such activity.

Richard Buxton

Another fine Arosa Room romance

My husband Paul and I met at the Rink in 1964. He was a friend of my younger brother, Maurice, who also skated at the rink. We then started ice dancing together and joined the Richmond Ice Dance Club, which we attended four times a week.

At that time I was also a member of the Civil Service Skating Club and had the pleasure each week of a one-hour session at Richmond on a Wednesday evening from 6pm to 7pm. This was before the general public were allowed into the Rink.

I had lessons with two teachers, Colin Kearney and later with Michael Birtwistle – Paul had lessons with Alison Smith and the late, great Betty Calloway. Then, on 7th May 1966, at the May Dance held in the Arosa Rooms, we got engaged – our wedding taking place on 30th March 1968 – with the reception celebrations in the



Churchill Suite at the Rink. Really, where else could it have been!?! Our best man, Ted Mills and his wife Jackie, were also members of the Dance Club. They had married on 27th March 1968 and delayed their honeymoon to be at our wedding. I remember that all of our Dance Club friends came upstairs, off the ice, to give their congratulations. They tried to persuade us to put on our skates and join them on the ice, but with a long train and veil on my dress, I wasn't going to take a chance.

We continued to skate until our first child, Andrew, was born in 1971, followed by Victoria in 1973 and David in 1974. This year we are celebrating our 45th Wedding Anniversary. The Rink was such a big part of our life, and we hold many very happy memories of it – we were so sad when it closed and it remains greatly missed.

Helen Strutton *[pictured above with Paul]*

How can something dead remain so alive?



In the 1980's Richmond Ice Rink was the place for my friends and I to meet, we've all got so many amazing memories of the Rink. Just like it was for the generations that had come before us, Richmond Ice Rink wasn't just about the skating, or ice hockey – it was the centre of our social lives – a real Rites of Passage for so many people.

When I first started the Memories of Richmond Ice Rink Facebook group with Dave Lane a couple of years ago, we had no idea how many people would come out of the woodwork – the comments and memories have been overwhelming – which proves that, despite being dead for over 20 years, the Rink still remains alive in the hearts and minds of thousands of people.

The reunions we have had to date have been wonderful, with some people flying in from as far away as New York to reminisce and see some 'old faces', so, the return of an ice rink to Twickenham this winter will be a very special moment for us all.

In our heart of hearts, we are all hoping the groundswell that will come from a successful temporary rink at York House will grow, and over the next few years, some real momentum will build, which could lead to a permanent return for Richmond Ice Rink. A place where future generations can have as much fun, and share as much love, as we did.

Gary Gibbs *[pictured above, far right]*

Taxi hooters and all that jazz

In 1958 we would skate at Richmond three times a week: Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays. A crowd of us would cycle from Whitton and Hounslow singing the latest pop songs on the way (Volare by Domenico Modugno or Dean Martin still springs to mind). Tuesday nights were disco nights and, on other nights, there was Victor Sylvester type ballroom music.

At around 9pm on Friday nights half the skaters would clear from the ice and could be found up in the bar watching *Hancock's Half Hour*. On a few occasions I smuggled in an old taxi hooter, and we would skate up behind unsuspecting girls and give a loud blast to help them on their way round.

In later years we went on our motorbikes and would stop off at the San Souci coffee bar in Richmond Road, Twickenham. I was foolish enough one night to leave my hockey boots tied on the back of my Triumph Tiger Cub and of course they had gone when I came out.



My friend's father sold me his old pair, which I kept until 2006 when I discovered them in the loft looking very sorry for themselves. Even then it was hard to throw them away with all the memories they conjured up. In the 1960's there were some good Modern Jazz Nights at the Arosa Rink. Happy days.

Malc Lane

[Pictured above] Dave Vinall, Derek Dunn, Geoff Adderly, Stuart Jones, Cynthia Goodyer, Bill 'Toby' Taylor and two girls from the Rink whose names are long forgotten.

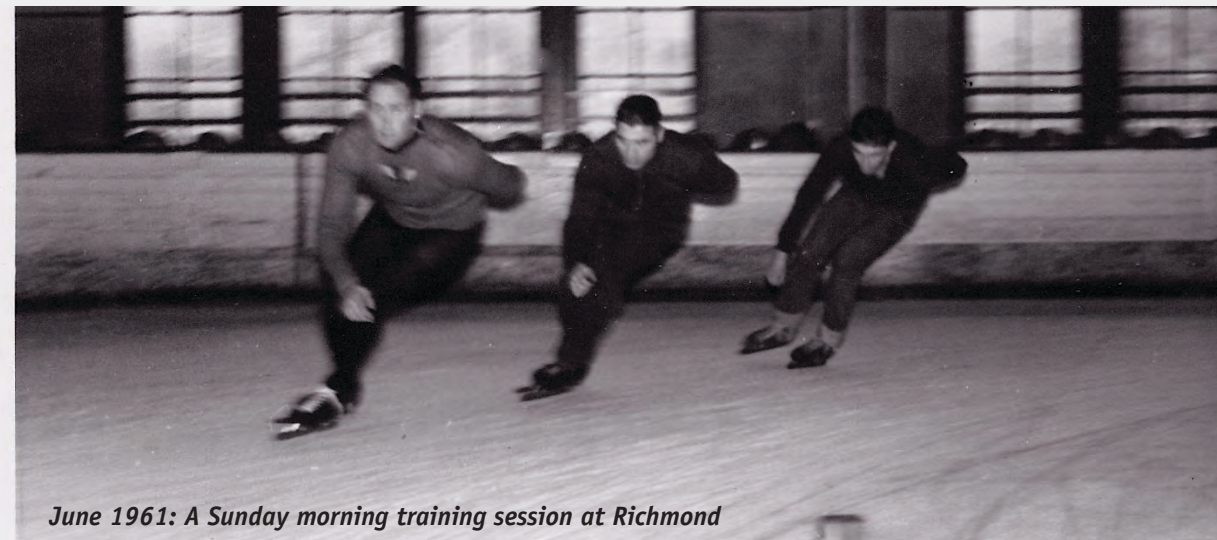
The heart of a proud, old local treasure

When I first saw the promotional postcards requesting memories and contributions celebrating 'the Sportsdrome', to give Richmond Ice Rink its other name, the following words jumped out and resonated with me immediately... "and buried in the foundations of the apartments that stand in the Rink's place, beats the heart of a proud, old local treasure..." They struck a chord, and this poignant tale sprang to my mind.

Sadly, back in 1994, one of my fellow Aldwych Speed Club skaters, Mark Woodman, died while watching his son compete at Bradford Ice Rink, he was aged just 63. Mark loved skating and had always said to his wife, and others that, when he died, he would like his ashes to be spread at Richmond Ice Rink because of his long association with, and his love for, the building and its Rink. But there was a problem when Mark passed away suddenly –



Mark Woodman (bottom right) in 1956 at Richmond Ice Rink



June 1961: A Sunday morning training session at Richmond

the Rink had been closed at the end of 1992 and work was already under way in preparation for building the apartments.

However, with the help of another old Aldwych member, Ralph Lythgoe, Mark's widow was still able to arrange for Mark's ashes to be taken to the building site where they managed to obtain permission to scatter the ashes on the area that was previously the footprint of the Ice Rink – thus Mark Woodman's wishes were carried out. It was easy to see why Mark's connection for the Richmond Rink was so strong, because so many

of us still feel the same way over 20 years after the place closed – myself included – and my 'home' Rink was Streatham. There was a shared, tangible sense of belonging within 'The best loved Ice Rink in the World'... so much so that even after two decades' residence at Guildford Ice Rink, the older ASC members that are still around don't feel anywhere near the same affinity with the buildings as we did with the Sportsdrome.

Chris Nelson

Kings, Queens and Maharajas

When my mother ceased to be a professional teacher of ice skating in March 1948, just one month before I was born, she still went to the Rink at Richmond virtually every day. I don't think that she ever had to pay to dance with the professional male instructors, because she was considered to be one of the finest ice dancers and teachers in England – they were pleased to dance with her and improve their own technique. One of those gentlemen was Roy Callaway, the husband of Betty, who taught Torville and Dean.

For several years my mother had been the professional skater at the Villars Palace Hotel in St Moritz with Melitta Bruner, who had fled to England when the Nazis took over Austria and after her husband, Paul Krackoff, was killed at the Dachau concentration camp.

She gave her job to my mother because she, Melitta, was at that time the mistress of Hubert Martinau, who was a multi millionaire. He had once been one of the owners of Richmond Rink, and like the Maharaja and Maharani of Baroda, had a whole suite in the Palace Hotel in 1946 where



he lived with Melitta. My mother actually taught the present Maharaja of Baroda to skate when he was a four-year-old.

Because of his role as the manager of the NSA speed team my father was given a month's leave of unpaid absence by the Ministry of Education, which was responsible for running the Science Museum. My mother's best English friend, Pat Wood Salmon, once commented that Gwen King's list of clients read like Debretts. Before my mother returned to full-time employment she and her friends held court with Pat at the Cadena Coffee House in Richmond. She was also the treasurer of the Twickenham Conservative Party Ladies' committee, which convened at 16 Richmond Bridge Mansions.

I also remember a rather snobbish neighbour of ours at Richmond Bridge Mansions once commentating to Pat Mullins, née Wood Salmon, whose son, like the woman in question and myself, went to the Mall School: "Mrs Mullins, what drawer does that Mrs King come from?" She replied: "Very high". "And what does she do?"... "She is a retired figure skater". Mrs X.: "Oh really". Pat replied "Yes, and what is more, two of her young pupils in the 1930's were a certain Elizabeth and Margaret Rose Windsor". This was when she was at the Grosvenor House Hotel ice rink in Park Lane.

After that she always invited us to have coffee at Töbler's coffee shop in Twickenham on the way back home after the Carol service at the Mall.

David King

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