

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, and I don't think that 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 just 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 in Dachau. She gave her job to my mother because she, Melitta, was at that time the mistress of Hubert Martinau, who was a multi millionaire, 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 there as 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, and before my mother actually returned to full-time employment she with her friends was said to hold court with Pat at the Cadeena Coffee House in Richmond. And 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 commented to Pat Mullins, née Wood Salmon, whose son, like the woman in question and myself, went to the Mall School asked: "Mrs Mullins what drawer does that Mrs King come from?" She replied: "Very high".

"And what does she do?"... "She is a retired figure skate". Mrs X.: "Oh really". Pat replied "yes and what is more two of her young pupils in the 1930s were a certain Elizabeth and Margaret Rose Windsor. When she was at the Grosvenor House Hotel ice rink, Park Lane.

After that we were always being asked to have coffee at Töbler's coffee shop in Twickenham on the way back home after the Carol service at the Mall.

David King