

INTERVIEWS WITH  
**Prominent Members.**

No. 4.



Mr. W. J. HOWELL.

## INTERVIEW WITH MR. W. J. HOWELL.

MR. WILLIAM JONES HOWELL, whose well known features are faithfully represented in the excellent portrait accompanying this sketch, is so inseparably associated with the conception, formation and development of the Hyde Park Recreation Club, that we deem ourselves fortunate in having successfully prevailed upon him, to allow himself to be the subject of our "Interview" for the present issue of the "Chronicle."

Mr. Howell is not a native of Leeds, although he has dwelt amongst us since he was four years of age, coming hither from Gloucestershire. As time progressed he founded and has since carried on the prosperous and ever increasing business of which he is still the head, his name throughout Leeds being almost as familiar to the ear as household words. He has worthily won his laurels, and is meek in the day of his prosperity. His almost lifelong residence in Leeds, his honourable business career extending over many years, added to merits in his social life, having for their aim the well-being of his fellow men, are credentials more than sufficient to confer upon him the qualifications of a good, sound, and useful citizen.

But, to-day, we are more immediately concerned with Mr. Howell in relation to the Club. It was recently our privilege to enjoy a brief but most agreeable conversation with him, although, it was with evident reluctance he permitted us to glean the necessary particulars for this descriptive sketch. The reason is not far to seek, when we explain that the spirit of boastfulness does not belong to him.

Like many other commercial and private gentlemen, Mr. Howell became a member of one of our great central clubs in the City, and for many years he has resided in the favoured suburb of Headingley. When,

at times, he sought an evening's recreation and the companionship of social friends, it became necessary to again turn his face towards the City ere his desire could be gratified. He soon became alive to the fact that recreation upon these lines was of an imperfect description, and left much to be desired. To his mind the City should be left severely alone after business hours, and living in the pleasantly residential district referred to, it occurred to him the "one thing needful" was a Recreation Club of a comprehensive character, which should combine outdoor as well as indoor pastimes and entertainments, a well ordered bowling green being always a prominent feature with him. If this could be accomplished, the City might be left to itself, and recreation could be had under more agreeable conditions of atmosphere and amid the pleasanter surroundings which the neighbourhood afforded.

Mr. Howell inwardly resolved that whenever an eligible site opened out, Hyde Park should have its Recreation Club. During the year 1889 the opportunity came, and our benefactor had the means, the ability, and the determination to make himself in every way equal to the occasion. He acquired the considerable area upon which now stands the nicely situated residences known as Princess May Terrace on the one side, and the Club-house and Grounds on the other, a wide well-paved road called Ash Grove dividing them. Mr. Howell lost no time in securing the services of Mr. Walter A. Hobson, architect, of Albion Street, with whom he discussed in minute detail the proposed Club, which now became more than ever the desire of his heart. Instructions were given for plans of Club-house and Grounds, and Mr. Hobson prepared them. These included an interesting bird's eye view shewing the design of the Building, with bowling green, tennis courts, shelter, &c., and even

representing tennis players indulging in their favorite game. The scheme was thoroughly comprehensive, and whatever difficulties presented themselves were faced courageously. The land was fenced round months before any meeting was called to promote the Club Company, and the ground was levelled and prepared for the bowling green before even a brick was laid in the erection of the Building. By this timely proceeding, Mr. Howell by constant personal supervision, was enabled to have the green ready for play during the first season of the Club's existence, and games, indeed, were played thereon before the actual completion of the Club-house.

The next step taken by Mr. Howell was to confer with his Architect, assisted by Mr. R. M. Burgess, than whom we have no greater friend in all that pertains to the welfare of the Club. These gentlemen went exhaustively into the whole question of plans, accommodation and cost. Based upon their careful deliberations rested the presentation of the scheme at any meeting which might be subsequently called with respect to it. It may be here stated that in the calculations of these gentlemen, Mr. Howell, so far from deriving, or desiring to derive any pecuniary benefit, offered the land at a mere nominal price, so much below its real value indeed, that it may be regarded as largely partaking the character of a gift. Hence the remarks of Ald. Cooke at the opening ceremony.

Meanwhile, the darling enterprise of Mr. Howell became known to a considerable number of friends in the locality and elsewhere, and there were not wanting many promises of support.

The next move towards attaining the desired goal took place at the Hyde Park Hotel. At Mr. Howell's request, Mr. James Mould, the landlord, posted notices calling a meeting of persons interested in the scheme,

and in addition kindly placed a room at disposal. The meeting was duly held, it was well attended, and much enthusiasm was manifested in the full discussion which took place. Mr. Denton Houghton, whose death we sincerely deplored early in the present year, was voted to the chair, and the whole scheme was clearly and fully laid before the gentlemen assembled. The proposal as submitted "caught on" instantly. The promotion of a Company was agreed upon, and many subscribers, then and there, announced their determination to take shares. Mr. Howell led the way with 500, whilst others took a considerable number amongst them: Mr. W. A. M. Brown, 50; Mr. R. M. Burgess, 50; Mr. Denton Houghton, 50; and, subsequently, the late Mr. Isaac Earnshaw, 50. In some instances, we believe, gentlemen considerably increased their holdings. Further meetings were necessarily convened, and Directors were appointed, Mr. Howell joining the Board after allotment. By the memorandum of Association the nominal capital of the Company was £3,000 divided into 3,000 shares of £1 each.

The subsequent erection of the Club-house and the opening ceremony in connection therewith have been dealt with in our earlier issues, and have become matters of history.

Thus was brought about the happy realization of Mr. Howell's fondest hope, and to him is due a lasting debt of gratitude. To tell the story of the Club without Mr. Howell would be very much like playing Hamlet with the part of Hamlet omitted. The original idea was his. This little seedling in the first instance, he kindly nurtured. It took root, fructified, and in due season blossomed forth in the fulness and beauty of vigorous health, as we are accustomed now to regard our favored Institution.

As may be readily supposed, Mr. Howell commands the respect and esteem of every member of the Club. We look upon him as the Father of the Club, and his popularity has grown with the growth of the Institution, until the one has become as firmly established as the other. He does not proclaim aloud the important part he has played, because we know from experience he prefers rather to "do good by stealth and blush to make it fame," but nothing can ever take away from him the consciousness of having performed a good and noble service, the net result of which, we venture to think, will be permitted to remain long chronicled as a happy and glorious consummation.

Mr. Howell takes a lively interest in the game of bowls, and was for two years President of the Bowling Section. "The Howell Challenge Cup" was presented by him for competition amongst the Bowlers, and to win the coveted trophy brings many ardent aspirants into the arena. The Cup, which is of sterling silver and of the value of £20 and of beautiful design is held for one year, and the names of the winners are engraved thereon. Mr. Howell also presented a handsome pair of bowls as a first prize for competition in the bowling handicap, which took place during the opening season of the Club.

In addition to being a Director of the Club, Mr. Howell has also taken an active part in the management from its commencement. He is on the Committee of Management, and serves also on the House Committee and Grounds Committee. He has very decided views as to the absolute necessity of exercising extreme care in the election of members, in order to maintain for the Club an unassailable position for stability and respectability. In meeting the wishes of the members, he advocates in regard to games the reasonable attractions, and the rational comforts which

modern habit has rendered indispensable, and in him we may be sure no pains will be spared to make them secure and permanent in the truest possible sense.

Another feature which gives strength to the popularity of Mr. Howell is, that he is possessed of a warm and generous heart. One has but to look into his face to see kindness shining out of it. The spirit of good humour is within him, there is manly frankness in his conversation, and he is replete with the essence of good fellowship.

With the paternal love which Mr. Howell cherishes for the Club, it is eminently befitting that he should "keep watch and guard" and we look forward hopefully to his kindly guardianship for many years with the keenest interest and satisfaction.

We now take our leave of Mr. Howell. May he live a long and happy life, even to becoming a pleasant instance of centenarianism. May he tread with easy pace the paths of pleasantness and peace, surrounded by his numerous friends who know, respect, admire, and honor him.

