

THE KEEPING FAMILY OF MILFORD

In 1901 when Fred Keeping moved from Pennington to Milford it was the start of an association with the village which included many years of public service and produced two very successful sportsmen on the world stage.

By the time he was 29 Fred was working as a clerk at the British Embassy in Athens and he entered the cycle races in the 1896 Olympics.

Objections were raised about Fred entering because he worked for a living and was not a gentleman so he could not possibly be an amateur. The protests were overruled and Fred took part in the 333 metres cycling sprint and the 12 hour endurance race.

The 12 hour race started at 5 am with six entrants, four from Greece, Adolf Schmal from Austria and Fred Keeping. Early in the race, Schmal, gained an early lap. He then rode with the pack until one by one the riders dropped out. Schmal rode directly behind Fred's wheel throughout and won by that single lap.

Richard Mandell, in his book *The First Modern Olympics*, wrote:

“Just two finished, in total distress, neither had eaten and had only sipped liquid. They were squalid from excreta and delirious from fatigue... their legs swollen gruesomely... both could be heard weeping”.

Schmal completed 900 laps [314.997 kilometres] winning a silver medal and Fred won the second place copper medal.



After returning to England, Fred opened a cycle shop in Milford and later a garage. He also had garages in New Milton and Lymington.

As well as a successful businessman Fred was also very prominent in local affairs:

- Managing Director of the Milford Electric Light Co.
- Member of Lymington District Council and Chairman from 1922 to 1932.
- Member and Chairman of several local Poor Law committees
- Member of the County Council
- Justice of the Peace and Chairman of the bench.



Following his death in 1950 his obituary said:

“He was not only a great business pioneer, but was also for many years one of the outstanding figures in the public life of the community which he served so faithfully and well and his white Edwardian beard, his distinctive cravat and hats made him a well-known personality”.

Fred's son, Mike, was born in Milford in 1902 and it was by chance that, one Saturday afternoon, he was persuaded to turn out for Milford Football Club to deputise for an injured player. Watching the match was a Southampton scout who had come to assess another member of the team and the scout immediately signed up Mike.

Southampton were still in the Southern League, in the summer of 1919, when they signed Mike as an amateur. He was a talented left-back and became a professional in December 1920. He remained with Southampton for 13 years and was then transferred to Fulham, where he stayed until 1939.

In 1926 he was with the England Football Association team which toured Canada, and three years later was a member of the England side which won all 17 of their fixtures when touring South Africa.



Michael Keeping Real Madrid C.F. Coach

January 1948 to October 1950

Copa Eva Duarte de Perón

Winners 1947

Real Madrid 3 Valencia 1



He made the headlines in 1948 when he became the manager of Real Madrid FC, one of the biggest football clubs in the world based at the famous Bernabeu stadium. At that time they were in danger of relegation, but Mike kept them in

the first division and played a key part in building up the side which was to dominate European football and in June 1948 he won the Copa Eva Duarte de Perón in the final against Valencia.

Mike died in Southampton hospital in March 1984 and apparently the man in the next bed said that the old fool thought he used to play football for England!

For further information visit the MOSHRS website which is a core part of its Bringing History Home project supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Milford-on-Sea Parish Council.

<https://www.milfordhistory.org.uk/content/history/buildings-and-monuments/buildings-and-monuments>

