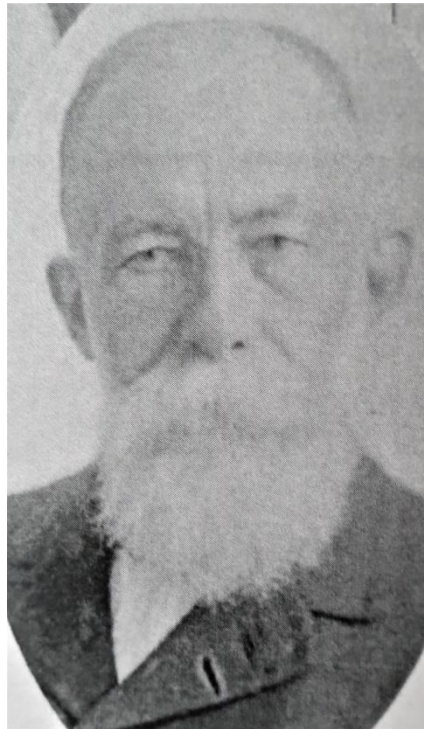


## Frederick Merttens 1849 - 1935



Frederick Merttens (known as Fritz) was born in Germany but left for Brazil in his late teens to avoid military service in the Prussian army. He quickly found his way to Rio de Janeiro and into a role in a cotton exporting business. Much of the trade was to Manchester in England, and in 1872 the firm sent him there as their resident agent. In 1874 Merttens saw an opportunity to break away from his agent role and so launched his own international merchanting business, Merttens & Co.

Frederick progressively installed very able assistants in the business, allowing him to follow his altruistic and philanthropic interests in Manchester. In 1886 his wife Ann was tragically killed in a carriage accident. In 1891 the 41 year old widower was living in Poynton in Cheshire but was switching his interests from the cotton trade to the possibility of buying a small manorial estate in Leicestershire.

In 1893, two ultimately related things came together. Rothley Temple Estate and the manorial lordship owned by Harry Rainer Parker came up for sale and the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire (later to become Great Central) Railway gained permission to complete a railway line running from Manchester by way of Nottingham, Loughborough, Leicester, Rugby and other stations ending in a new station at Marylebone in London.

Frederick Merttens noticed that the new line was due to skirt the western end of the 700 acres of the Rothley Temple estate and that there was scope for a local station. He could buy the estate and become Lord of an ancient English Manor and the squire of a village, use some of his 700 acres to develop a leafy garden suburb serviced by the railway connections to Nottingham and Leicester and even commute to London or his offices in Manchester. So, buy the estate he did, in 1893 for £40,000, nearly 5 million pounds at today's values.

The old Rothley Temple manor house (now Rothley Court Hotel) was greatly in need of renovation and it was four years before Frederick and his new wife Margaret moved in, in May 1897. Around this time Merttens was making strenuous efforts to secure a station at Rothley on the M,S and L railway line. There was competition from the Earl of Lanesborough who wanted the station to be situated at Swithland to be near his estate at

Swithland Hall. However Mertten's bid prevailed due to pressure from Rothley villagers and probably more importantly, the gift of the land, free of charge, for the station and the line, to the railway company. Rothley station was opened in 1899.



In 1900, the first part of Mertten's Rothley Garden Suburb dream had begun, with the construction of a new residential road, The Ridgeway. This was needed to create an avenue of roadside plots within walking distance of the new railway station. A redundant small cricket pavilion from Newtown Linford was relocated to a site at the end of the Ridgeway, facing the station, to serve as the office and sales centre. Rothley Garden Suburb eventually encompassed the Ridgeway, Swithland Lane, Brownhill Crescent, The Ridings and the west end of Westfield Lane. Incidentally excavation of the railway cutting disturbed Saxon graves, the road excavations unearthed parts of a substantial Roman villa.

By 1908 there were 21 houses on Swithland Lane and 9 houses on The Ridgeway.

Next instalment:

- We will reveal the name of the course architect who designed our golf course
- Rothley Park Golf Club formed in August 1911
- James Sorley, Rothley Park's first professional, appointed February 1912
- Official opening of 18 holes in May 1912
- Exhibition match between Harry Vardon and James Braid in May 1913

