

# Audrey Appleby

Leading hockey umpire who belied the image of stuffy matriarchs in tweeds by officiating with humour and approachability

Once Audrey Appleby fell in love with playing hockey, it was obvious the sport would play a huge part in her life. After she joined Ealing Hockey Club in 1941, one of her first responsibilities was to go shopping for the players' tea on a Saturday morning, put the makings in the basket on her bicycle and ride a mile and a half down Gunnersbury Avenue.

After a few seasons of faithful and enthusiastic service, she realised her chances of promotion from the Ealing Ladies 2nd XI were slim because the right wing in the first team was an England international. Instead, having tired of poor umpiring decisions, she resolved to do something about it and pick up the whistle herself.

"In those days to be recognised you needed grey hair before the officials even considered you," she recalled. "And the people judging you really didn't want anyone else to come on the scene. But I was absolutely determined to get my A Grade and it was a very, very lonely business."

Once awarded the certificate in 1966, Appleby progressed to umpiring



Appleby, centre, with team-mates

numerous world-level events. Her approachability and sense of humour were in stark contrast to some of the stuffier hockey matriarchs of her day in their tweeds and dull, shapeless outfits.

Appleby enunciated her rulings on the pitch in a ringing voice. One

acquaintance described her beautiful diction as sounding like Audrey Forbes-Hamilton from the television series *To the Manor Born*.

One of the highlights of her career was umpiring at two Wembley internationals in 1967 and 1973. Before the first one between England and Ireland she had a (shorter) grey skirt made for the occasion and, dispensing with the traditional thick tights, became the first female umpire to wear knee-high socks.

Officiating in front of more than 60,000 screaming schoolgirls and a televised audience put her on "cloud nine", she said. Her only regret was that her mother, who died later that year, could not attend.

Gill Clarke, England's most celebrated hockey umpire who officiated at three Olympic Games and two World Cups (including three finals), might have given up early on in her career had Appleby not intervened.

"I wasn't getting anywhere trying to challenge some of the entrenched interpretations and was pretty disillusioned. But Audrey invited me to lunch

at her beautiful cottage in the Wiltshire countryside and persuaded me to continue. She told me to be myself and not be afraid of trying to do things differently. I think she was probably the first players' umpire," Clarke recalled.

Appleby admitted to being conned by players on very few occasions. In one international she bowed to furious claims by the Dutch that they had stopped when an England player fell over in the circle and subsequently disallowed the England equaliser. Thereafter the Dutch always affectionately referred to her as "Mrs Apple Pie".

Audrey Beryl Crow was born in Lambeth, south London, the only child of Roland, a newsagent and shopkeeper, and May (née Rumsey), a housewife.

She attended a private school in Kew called Bunting House until she was 15 and was due to move on to North London Collegiate School when the war broke out and her father insisted the family decamp to the countryside. However, they soon returned to London and Audrey went to work for a City bank, where she met Alec Appleby.

They married in 1943 and Alec joined her father in running the family's six newsagents. Deciding not to go with her husband when he emigrated to Canada, Appleby ran the newsagents for another 30 years. The couple were reunited in 1996 on his return to Britain. They lived together in Bourne-mouth until his death in 2012.

Appleby remained involved in the women's game. When the All England Women's Hockey Association was in financial difficulty, she helped to rescue the situation. In 1992 she was named an honorary vice-president.

Appleby enjoyed cooking, golf and needlework. One of her beloved Cavalier King Charles spaniels was always in tow, obeying the every command of the popular hockey umpire.

**Audrey Appleby, international hockey umpire, was born on May 30, 1924. She died after a short illness following a fall on April 19, 2020, aged 95**